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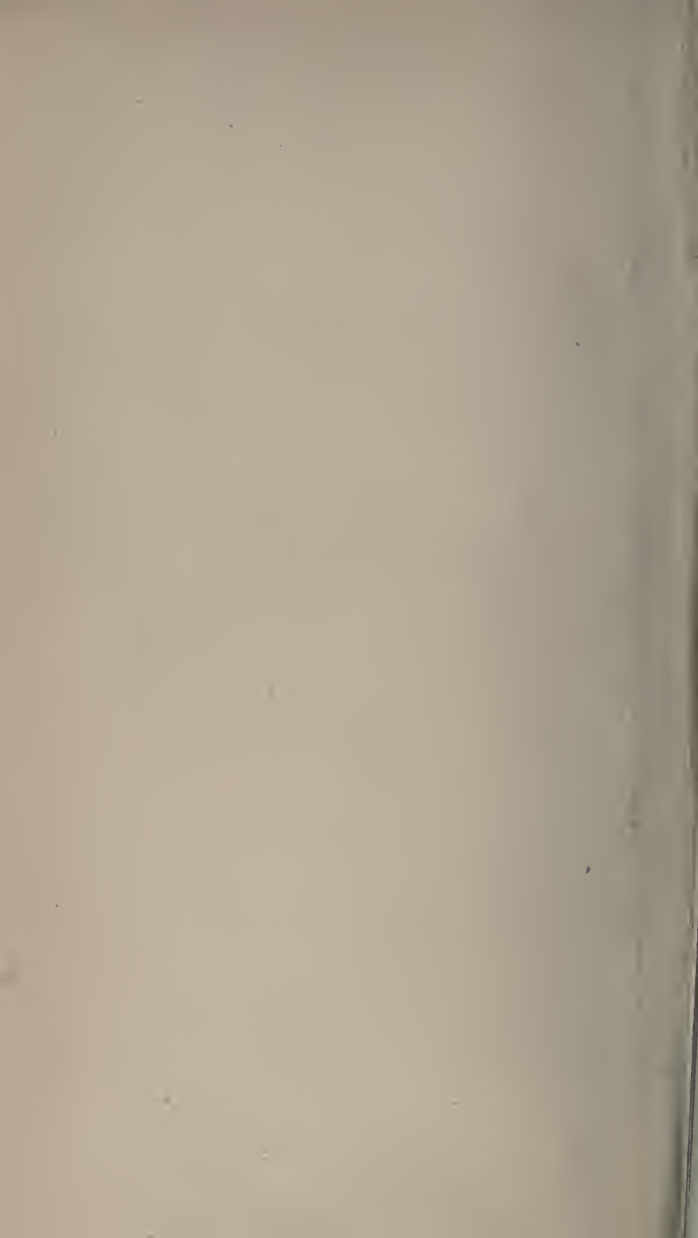
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THE POETICAL WORKS

OF

ROBERT BROWNING

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HONORARY FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD

VOL. IV.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON
COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY
DRAMATIC ROMANCES

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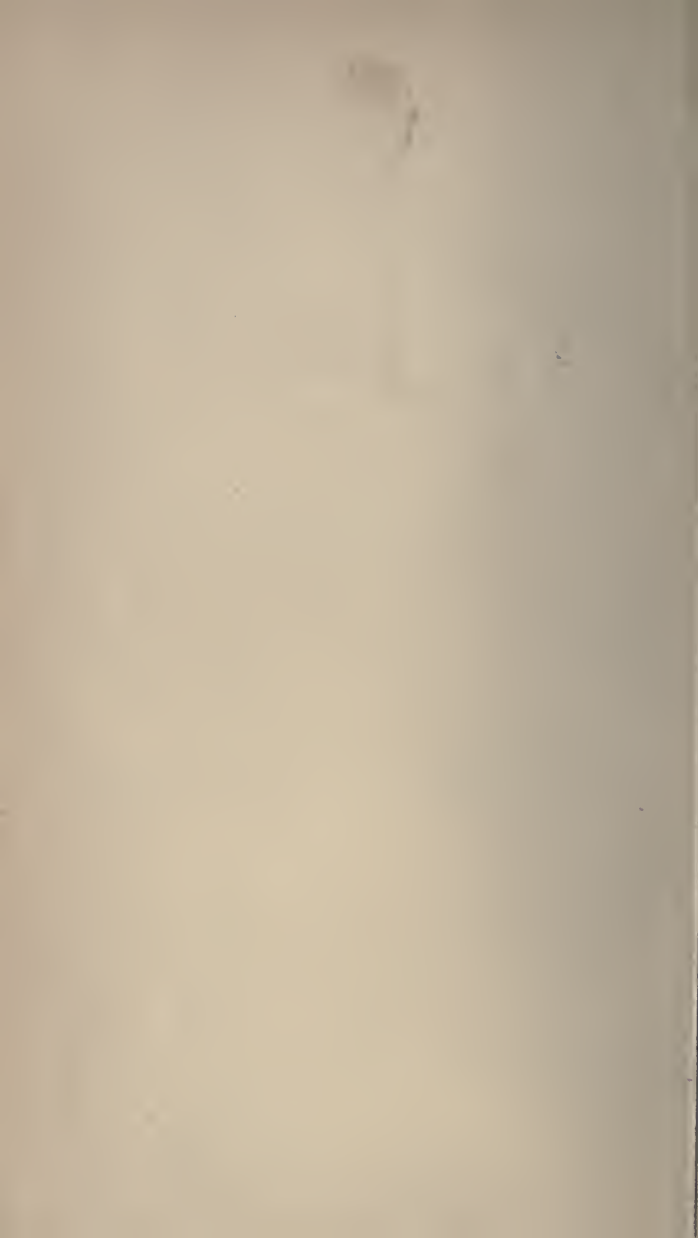
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A
BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON.

A TRAGEDY.

1843.

PERSONS.

MILDRED TRESHAM.

GUENDOLEN TRESHAM.

THOROLD, Earl Tresham.

AUSTIN TRESHAM.

HENRY, Earl Mertoun.

GERARD, and other Retainers of Lord Tresham.

TIME 17—

A

BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *The interior of a lodge in LORD TRESHAM'S park. Many Retainers crowded at the window, supposed to command a view of the entrance to his mansion. GERARD, the Warrener, his back to a table on which are flagons, etc.*

1st. Ret. Ay, do ! push, friends, and then you 'll push down me !

—What for ? Does any hear a runner's foot
Or a steed's trample or a coach-wheel's cry ?
Is the Earl come or his least poursuivant ?
But there 's no breeding in a man of you
Save Gerard yonder : here 's a half-place yet,
Old Gerard !

Ger. Save your courtesies, my friend.
Here is my place.

2nd Ret. Now, Gerard, out with it !
What makes you sullen, this of all the days
I' the year ? To-day that young rich bountiful
Handsome Earl Mertoun, whom alone they match
With our Lord Tresham through the country-side,

Is coming here in utmost bravery
To ask our master's sister's hand?

Ger.

What then?

2nd Ret. What then? Why, you, she speaks to, if
she meets

Your worship, smiles on as you hold apart
The boughs to let her through her forest walks,
You, always favourite for your no-deserts,
You 've heard, these three days, how Earl Mertoun sues
To lay his heart and house and broad lands too
At Lady Mildred's feet : and while we squeeze
Ourselves into a mousehole lest we miss
One congee of the least page in his train,
You sit o' one side—"there 's the Earl," say I—
"What then," say you !

3rd Ret.

I 'll wager he has let

Both swans he tamed for Lady Mildred, swim
Over the falls and gain the river !

Ger.

Ralph,

Is not to-morrow my inspecting-day
For you and for your hawks?

4th Ret.

Let Gerard be !

He 's coarse-grained, like his carved black cross-bow
stock.

Ha, look now, while we squabble with him, look !
Well done, now—is not this beginning, now,
To purpose?

1st Ret.

Our retainers look as fine—

That 's comfort. Lord, how Richard holds himself

With his white staff ! Will not a knave behind
Prick him upright ?

4th Ret. He 's only bowing, fool !

The Earl's man bent us lower by this much.

1st Ret. That 's comfort. Here 's a very cavalcade !

3rd Ret. I don't see wherefore Richard, and his troop
Of silk and silver varlets there, should find
Their perfumed selves so indispensable
On high days, holidays ! Would it so disgrace
Our family, if I, for instance, stood—
In my right hand a cast of Swedish hawks,
A leash of greyhounds in my left ?—

Ger. —With Hugh

The logman for supporter, in his right
The bill-hook, in his left the brushwood-shears !

3rd Ret. Out on you, crab ! What next, what next ?
The Earl !

1st Ret. Oh Walter, groom, our horses, do they match
The Earl's ? Alas, that first pair of the six—
They paw the ground—Ah Walter ! and that brute
Just on his haunches by the wheel !

6th Ret. Ay—Ay !

You, Philip, are a special hand, I hear,
At soups and sauces : what 's a horse to you ?
D' ye mark that beast they 've slid into the midst
So cunningly ?—then, Philip, mark this further ;
No leg has he to stand on !

1st Ret. No ? That 's comfort.

2nd Ret. Peace, Cook! The Earl descends.—Well,
Gerard, see

The Earl at least! Come, there's a proper man,
I hope! Why, Ralph, no falcon, Pole or Swede,
Has got a starrier eye.

3rd Ret. His eyes are blue—
But leave my hawks alone!

4th Ret. So young, and yet
So tall and shapely!

5th Ret. Here's Lord Tresham's self!
There now—there's what a nobleman should be!
He's older, graver, loftier, he's more like
A House's head!

2nd Ret. But you'd not have a boy
—And what's the Earl beside?—possess too soon
That stateliness?

1st Ret. Our master takes his hand—
Richard and his white staff are on the move—
Back fall our people—(tsh!—there's Timothy
Sure to get tangled in his ribbon-ties—
And Peter's cursed rosette's a-coming off!)
—At last I see our lord's back and his friend's—
And the whole beautiful bright company
Close round them—in they go! [*Jumping down from
the window-bench, and making for the table and
its jugs.*] Good health, long life,
Great joy to our Lord Tresham and his House!

6th Ret. My father drove his father first to court,
After his marriage-day—ay, did he!

2nd Ret.

God bless

Lord Tresham, Lady Mildred, and the Earl !

Here, Gerard, reach your beaker !

Ger.

Drink, my boys !

Don't mind me—all 's not right about me—drink !

2nd Ret. [Aside.] He 's vexed, now, that he let the
show escape !*[To GER.]* Remember that the Earl returns this way.*Ger.* That way ?*2nd Ret.*

Just so.

*Ger.*Then my way 's here. *[Goes.]**2nd Ret.*

Old Gerard

Will die soon—mind, I said it ! He was used

To care about the pitifullest thing

That touched the House's honour, not an eye

But his could see wherein : and on a cause

Of scarce a quarter this importance, Gerard

Fairly had fretted flesh and bone away

In cares that this was right, nor that was wrong,

Such point decorous, and such square by rule—

He knew such niceties, no herald more :

And now—you see his humour : die he will !

2nd Ret. God help him ! Who 's for the great ser-
vant's-hall

To hear what 's going on inside ? They 'd follow

Lord Tresham into the saloon.

3rd Ret.

I !—

4th Ret.

I !—

Leave Frank alone for catching, at the door,

Some hint of how the parley goes inside !
 Prosperity to the great House once more !
 Here 's the last drop !

1st Ret.

Have at you ! Boys, hurrah !

SCENE II.—*A Saloon in the Mansion.*

Enter LORD TRESHAM, LORD MERTOUN, AUSTIN, and
 GUENDOLEN.

Tresh. I welcome you, Lord Mertoun, yet once more,
 To this ancestral roof of mine. Your name
 —Noble among the noblest in itself,
 Yet taking in your person, fame avers,
 New price and lustre,—(as that gem you wear,
 Transmitted from a hundred knightly breasts,
 Fresh chased and set and fixed by its last lord,
 Seems to re-kindle at the core)—your name
 Would win you welcome !—

Mer.

Thanks !

Tresh.

—But add to that,

The worthiness and grace and dignity
 Of your proposal for uniting both
 Our Houses even closer than respect
 Unites them now—add these, and you must grant
 One favour more, nor that the least,—to think
 The welcome I should give ;—'t is given ! My lord,
 My only brother, Austin—he 's the king's.
 Our cousin, Lady Guendolen—betrothed
 To Austin : all are yours.

Mer. I thank you—less
 For the expressed commendings which your seal,
 And only that, authenticates—forbids
 My putting from me . . . to my heart I take
 Your praise . . . but praise less claims my gratitude,
 Than the indulgent insight it implies
 Of what must needs be uppermost with one
 Who comes, like me, with the bare leave to ask,
 In weighed and measured unimpassioned words,
 A gift, which, if as calmly 't is denied,
 He must withdraw, content upon his cheek,
 Despair within his soul. That I dare ask
 Firmly, near boldly, near with confidence
 That gift, I have to thank you. Yes, Lord Tresham,
 I love your sister—as you 'd have one love
 That lady . . . oh more, more I love her! Wealth,
 Rank, all the world thinks me, they 're yours, you
 know,
 To hold or part with, at your choice—but grant
 My true self, me without a rood of land,
 A piece of gold, a name of yesterday,
 Grant me that lady, and you . . . Death or life?

Guen. [*apart to Aus.*] Why, this is loving, Austin!

Aus. He 's so young!

Guen. Young? Old enough, I think, to half surmise
 He never had obtained an entrance here,
 Were all this fear and trembling needed.

Aus. Hush!

He reddens.

Guen. Mark him, Austin ; that 's true love !
Ours must begin again.

Tresh. We 'll sit, my lord.
Ever with best desert goes diffidence.
I may speak plainly nor be misconceived.
That I am wholly satisfied with you
On this occasion, when a falcon's eye
Were dull compared with mine to search out faults,
Is somewhat. Mildred's hand is hers to give
Or to refuse.

Mer. But you, you grant my suit ?
I have your word if hers ?

Tresh. My best of words
If hers encourage you. I trust it will.
Have you seen Lady Mildred, by the way ?

Mer. I . . I . . our two demesnes, remember, touch ;
I have been used to wander carelessly
After my stricken game : the heron roused
Deep in my woods, has trailed its broken wing
Thro' thicks and glades a mile in yours,—or else
Some eyass ill-reclaimed has taken flight
And lured me after her from tree to tree,
I marked not whither. I have come upon
The lady's wondrous beauty unaware,
And—and then . . I have seen her.

Guen. [*aside to Aus.*] Note that mode
Of faltering out that, when a lady passed,
He, having eyes, did see her ! You had said—
“ On such a day I scanned her, head to foot ;

“ Observed a red, where red should not have been,
“ Outside her elbow ; but was pleased enough
“ Upon the whole.” Let such irreverent talk
Be lessoned for the future !

Tresh. What 's to say
May be said briefly. She has never known
A mother's care ; I stand for father too.
Her beauty is not strange to you, it seems—
You cannot know the good and tender heart,
Its girl's trust and its woman's constancy,
How pure yet passionate, how calm yet kind,
How grave yet joyous, how reserved yet free
As light where friends are—how imbued with lore
The world most prizes, yet the simplest, yet
The . . one might know I talked of Mildred—thus
We brothers talk !

Mer. I thank you.

Tresh. In a word,
Control 's not for this lady ; but her wish
To please me outstrips in its subtlety
My power of being pleased : herself creates
The want she means to satisfy. My heart
Prefers your suit to her as 't were its own.
Can I say more ?

Mer. No more—thanks, thanks—no more !

Tresh. This matter then discussed . . .

Mer. —We 'll waste no breath
On aught less precious. I 'm beneath the roof
Which holds her : while I thought of that, my speech

To you would wander—as it must not do,
 Since as you favour me I stand or fall.

I pray you suffer that I take my leave !

Tresh. With less regret 't is suffered, that again
 We meet, I hope, so shortly.

Mer.

We ? again ?—

Ah yes, forgive me—when shall . . you will crown
 Your goodness by forthwith apprising me
 When . . if . . the lady will appoint a day
 For me to wait on you—and her.

Tresh.

So soon

As I am made acquainted with her thoughts
 On your proposal—howsoe'er they lean—
 A messenger shall bring you the result.

Mer. You cannot bind me more to you, my lord.
 Farewell till we renew . . I trust, renew
 A converse ne'er to disunite again.

Tresh. So may it prove !

Mer.

You, lady, you, sir, take

My humble salutation !

Guen. & Aus.

Thanks !

Tresh.

Within there !

[*Servants enter.* TRESHAM conducts MERTOUN to the door. *Mean-
 time AUSTIN remarks,*

Well,

Here I have an advantage of the Earl,
 Confess now ! I 'd not think that all was safe
 Because my lady's brother stood my friend !
 Why, he makes sure of her—"do you say, yes—

"She 'll not say, no,"—what comes it to beside?
 I should have prayed the brother, "speak this speech,
 "For Heaven's sake urge this on her—put in this—
 "Forget not, as you 'd save me, t' other thing,—
 "Then set down what she says, and how she looks,
 "And if she smiles, and" (in an under breath)
 "Only let her accept me, and do you
 "And all the world refuse me, if you dare!"

Guen. That way you 'd take, friend Austin? What a shame

I was your cousin, tamely from the first
 Your bride, and all this fervour 's run to waste!
 Do you know you speak sensibly to-day?
 The Earl 's a fool.

Aus. Here 's Thorold. Tell him so!

Tresh. (*returning.*) Now, voices, voices! 'St! the lady 's first!

How seems he?—seems he not . . come, faith give fraud
 The mercy-stroke whenever they engage!
 Down with fraud, up with faith! How seems the Earl?
 A name! a blazon! if you knew their worth,
 As you will never! come—the Earl?

Guen. He 's young.

Tresh. What 's she? an infant save in heart and brain.
 Young! Mildred is fourteen, remark! And you . .
 Austin, how old is she?

Guen. There 's tact for you!

I meant that being young was good excuse
 If one should tax him . .

Tresh. Well ?

Guen. —With lacking wit.

Tresh. He lacked wit ? Where might he lack wit, so please you ?

Guen. In standing straighter than the steward's rod
And making you the tiresomest harangue,
Instead of slipping over to my side
And softly whispering in my ear, " Sweet lady,
" Your cousin there will do me detriment
" He little dreams of : he 's absorbed, I see,
" In my old name and fame—be sure he 'll leave
" My Mildred, when his best account of me
" Is ended, in full confidence I wear
" My grandsire's periwig down either cheek.
" I 'm lost unless your gentleness vouchsafes " . .

Tresh. . . " To give a best of best accounts, yourself.
" Of me and my demerits." You are right !
He should have said what now I say for him.
Yon golden creature, will you help us all ?
Here 's Austin means to vouch for much, but you
—You are . . what Austin only knows ! Come up,
All three of us : she 's in the library
No doubt, for the day 's wearing fast. Precede !

Guen. Austin, how we must—!

Tresh. Must what ? Must speak truth,
Malignant tongue ! Detect one fault in him !
I challenge you !

Guen. Witchcraft 's a fault in him,
For you 're bewitched.

Tresh. What 's urgent we obtain
Is, that she soon receive him—say, to-morrow—
Next day at furthest.

Guen. Ne'er instruct me !

Tresh. Come !
—He 's out of your good graces, since forsooth,
He stood not as he 'd carry us by storm
With his perfections ! You 're for the composed
Manly assured becoming confidence !
—Get her to say, "to-morrow," and I 'll give you . .
I 'll give you black Urganda, to be spoiled
With petting and snail-paces. Will you ? Come !

SCENE III. MILDRED'S Chamber. *A painted window overlooks the Park.* MILDRED and GUENDOLEN.

Guen. Now, Mildred, spare those pains. I have not
left

Our talkers in the library, and climbed
The wearisome ascent to this your bower
In company with you,—I have not dared . .
Nay, worked such prodigies as sparing you
Lord Mertoun's pedigree before the flood,
Which Thorold seemed in very act to tell
—Or bringing Austin to pluck up that most
Firm-rooted heresy—your suitor's eyes,
He would maintain, were grey instead of blue—
I think I brought him to contrition !—Well,
I have not done such things, (all to deserve

A minute's quiet cousin's talk with you,)
To be dismissed so coolly !

Mil.

Guendolen !

What have I done ? what could suggest . .

Guen.

There, there !

Do I not comprehend you 'd be alone
To throw those testimonies in a heap,
Thorold's enlargings, Austin's brevities,
With that poor silly heartless Guendolen's
Ill-timed misplaced attempted smartnesses—
And sift their sense out ? now, I come to spare you
Nearly a whole night's labour. Ask and have !
Demand, be answered ! Lack I ears and eyes ?
Am I perplexed which side, of the rock-table
The Conqueror dined on when he landed first,
Lord Mertoun's ancestor was bidden take—
The bow-hand or the arrow-hand's great meed ?
Mildred, the Earl has soft blue eyes !

Mil.

My brother—

Did he . . you said that he received him well ?

Guen. If I said only "well" I said not much—

Oh, stay—which brother ?

Mil.

Thorold ! who—who else ?

Guen. Thorold (a secret) is too proud by half,—
Nay, hear me out—with us he 's even gentler
Than we are with our birds. Of this great House
The least retainer that e'er caught his glance
Would die for him, real dying—no mere talk :
And in the world, the court, if men would cite

The perfect spirit of honour, Thorold's name
Rises of its clear nature to their lips.

But he should take men's homage, trust in it,
And care no more about what drew it down.

He has desert, and that, acknowledgment ;
Is he content ?

Mil. You wrong him, Guendolen.

Guen. He 's proud, confess ; so proud with brooding
o'er

The light of his interminable line,
An ancestry with men all paladins,
And women all . .

Mil. Dear Guendolen, 't is late !

When yonder purple pane the climbing moon
Pierces, I know 't is midnight.

Guen. Well, that Thorold
Should rise up from such musings, and receive
One come audaciously to graft himself
Into this peerless stock, yet find no flaw,
No slightest spot in such an one . . .

Mil. Who finds
A spot in Mertoun ?

Guen. Not your brother ; therefore,
Not the whole world.

Mil. I am weary, Guendolen.—
Bear with me !

Guen. I am foolish.

Mil. Oh no, kind—
But I would rest.

Guen. Good night and rest to you !

I said how gracefully his mantle lay
Beneath the rings of his light hair ?

Mil. Brown hair.

Guen. Brown ? why it *is* brown—how could you know
that ?

Mil. How ? did not you—Oh, Austin 't was, declared
His hair was light, not brown—my head !—and look,
The moon-beam purpling the dark chamber ! Sweet,
Good night !

Guen. Forgive me—sleep the soundlier for me !

[Going, she turns suddenly.

Mildred !

Perdition ! all 's discovered ! Thorold finds
—That the Earl's greatest of all grandmothers
Was grander daughter still—to that fair dame
Whose garter slipped down at the famous dance ! *[Goes.*

Mil. Is she—can she be really gone at last ?
My heart ! I shall not reach the window. Needs
Must I have sinned much, so to suffer !

*[She lifts the small lamp which is suspended before the
Virgin's image in the window, and places it by the
purple pane.*

There !

[She returns to the seat in front.

Mildred and Mertoun ! Mildred, with consent
Of all the world and Thorold, Mertoun's bride !
Too late ! 'T is sweet to think of, sweeter still
To hope for, that this blessed end soothes up
The curse of the beginning ; but I know

It comes too late : 't will sweetest be of all
 To dream my soul away and die upon. [*A noise without.*
 The voice ! Oh why, why glided sin the snake
 Into the paradise Heaven meant us both ?

[*The window opens softly. A low voice sings.*

There 's a woman like a dew-drop, she 's so purer than the purest ;
 And her noble heart 's the noblest, yes, and her sure faith 's the
 surest :

And her eyes are dark and humid, like the depth on depth of lustre
 Hid i' the harebell, while her tresses, sunnier than the wild-grape
 cluster,

Gush in golden-tinted plenty down her neck's rose-misted marble :
 Then her voice's music . . call it the well's bubbling, the bird's
 warble !

[*A figure wrapped in a mantle appears at the window.*

And this woman says, "My days were sunless and my nights were
 moonless,

' Parched the pleasant April herbage, and the lark's heart's out-
 break tuneless,

' If you loved me not !" And I who—(ah, for words of flame !)
 adore her,

Who am mad to lay my spirit prostrate palpably before her—

[*He enters, approaches her seat, and bends over her.*

I may enter at her portal soon, as now her lattice takes me,
 And by noontide as by midnight make her mine, as hers she
 makes me !

[*The EARL throws off his slouched hat and long cloak.*

My very heart sings, so I sing, beloved !

Mil. Sit, Henry—do not take my hand !

Mer.

'T is mine.

The meeting that appalled us both so much
 Is ended.

Mil. What begins now ?

Mer. Happiness
Such as the world contains not.

Mil. That is it.
Our happiness would, as you say, exceed
The whole world's best of blisses : we—do we
Deserve that ? Utter to your soul, what mine
Long since, Beloved, has grown used to hear,
Like a death-knell, so much regarded once,
And so familiar now ; this will not be !

Mer. Oh Mildred, have I met your brother's face,
Compelled myself—if not to speak untruth,
Yet to disguise, to shun, to put aside
The truth, as—what had e'er prevailed on me
Save you, to venture ? Have I gained at last
Your brother, the one scarer of your dreams,
And waking thoughts' sole apprehension too ?
Does a new life, like a young sunrise, break
On the strange unrest of our night, confused
With rain and stormy flaw—and will you see
No dripping blossoms, no fire-tinted drops
On each live spray, no vapour steaming up,
And no expressless glory in the East ?
When I am by you, to be ever by you,
When I have won you and may worship you,
Oh, Mildred, can you say "this will not be ?"

Mil. Sin has surprised us ; so will punishment.

Mer. No—me alone, who sinned alone !

Mil. The night
You likened our past life to—was it storm

Throughout to you then, Henry?

Mer.

Of your life

I spoke—what am I, what my life, to waste
A thought about when you are by me?—you
It was, I said my folly called the storm
And pulled the night upon. 'T was day with me—
Perpetual dawn with me.

Mil.

Come what, come will,

You have been happy : take my hand !

Mer. [*after a pause.*]

How good

Your brother is ! I figured him a cold—
Shall I say, haughty man ?

Mil.

They told me all.

I know all.

Mer.

It will soon be over.

Mil.

Over ?

Oh, what is over ? what must I live through
And say, " 't is over ? " Is our meeting over ?
Have I received in presence of them all
The partner of my guilty love,—with brow
Trying to seem a maiden's brow—with lips
Which make believe that when they strive to form
Replies to you and tremble as they strive,
It is the nearest ever they approached
A stranger's . . Henry, yours that stranger's . . lip—
With cheek that looks a virgin's, and that is . . .
Ah God, some prodigy of thine will stop
This planned piece of deliberate wickedness
In its birth even ! some fierce leprous spot
Will mar the brow's dissimulating ! I

Shall murmur no smooth speeches got by heart,
But, frenzied, pour forth all our woeful story,
The love, the shame, and the despair—with them
Round me aghast as men round some cursed fount
That should spirt water, and spouts blood. I 'll not
. . . Henry, you do not wish that I should draw
This vengeance down? I 'll not affect a grace
That 's gone from me—gone once, and gone for ever!

Mer. Mildred, my honour is your own. I 'll share
Disgrace I cannot suffer by myself.

A word informs your brother I retract
This morning's offer; time will yet bring forth
Some better way of saving both of us.

Mil. I 'll meet their faces, Henry!

Mer.

When? to-morrow!

Get done with it!

Mil.

Oh Henry, not to-morrow!

Next day! I never shall prepare my words
And looks and gestures sooner.—How you must
Despise me!

Mer.

Mildred, break it if you choose,
A heart the love of you uplifted—still
Uplifts, thro' this protracted agony,
To heaven! but Mildred, answer me,—first pace
The chamber with me—once again—now, say
Calmly the part, the . . what it is of me
You see contempt (for you did say contempt)
—Contempt for you in! I would pluck it off
And cast it from me!—but no—no, you 'll not
Repeat that?—will you, Mildred, repeat that?

Mil. Dear Henry !

Mer. I was scarce a boy—e'en now

What am I more? And you were infantine
When first I met you ; why, your hair fell loose
On either side ! My fool's-cheek reddens now
Only in the recalling how it burned
That morn to see the shape of many a dream
—You know we boys are prodigal of charms
To her we dream of—I had heard of one,
Had dreamed of her, and I was close to her,
Might speak to her, might live and die her own,
Who knew? I spoke. Oh Mildred, feel you not
That now, while I remember every glance
Of yours, each word of yours, with power to test
And weigh them in the diamond scales of pride,
Resolved the treasure of a first and last
Heart's love shall have been bartered at its worth,
—That now I think upon your purity
And utter ignorance of guilt—your own
Or other's guilt—the girlish undisguised
Delight at a strange novel prize—(I talk
A silly language, but interpret, you !)
If I, with fancy at its full, and reason
Scarce in its germ, enjoined you secrecy,
If you had pity on my passion, pity
On my protested sickness of the soul
To sit beside you, hear you breathe, and watch
Your eyelids and the eyes beneath—if you
Accorded gifts and knew not they were gifts—

If I grew mad at last with enterprise
 And must behold my beauty in her bower
 Or perish—(I was ignorant of even
 My own desires—what then were you?) if sorrow—
 Sin—if the end came—must I now renounce
 My reason, blind myself to light, say truth
 Is false and lie to God and my own soul?
 Contempt were all of this!

Mil.

Do you believe . .

Or, Henry, I'll not wrong you—you believe
 That I was ignorant. I scarce grieve o'er
 The past! We'll love on; you will love me still!

Mer. Oh, to love less what one has injured! Dove,
 Whose pinion I have rashly hurt, my breast—
 Shall my heart's warmth not nurse thee into strength?
 Flower I have crushed, shall I not care for thee?
 Bloom o'er my crest, my fight-mark and device!
 Mildred, I love you and you love me!

Mil.

Go!

Be that your last word. I shall sleep to-night.

Mer. This is not our last meeting?

Mil.

One night more.

Mer. And then—think, then!

Mil.

Then, no sweet courtship-

days,

No dawning consciousness of love for us,
 No strange and palpitating births of sense
 From words and looks, no innocent fears and hopes,
 Reserves and confidences: morning's over!

Mer. How else should love's perfected noontide follow?

All the dawn promised shall the day perform.

Mil. So may it be! but——

You are cautious, Love?

Are sure that unobserved you scaled the walls?

Mer. Oh, trust me! Then our final meeting's fixed?
To-morrow night?

Mil. Farewell! Stay, Henry . . wherefore?
His foot is on the yew-tree bough; the turf
Receives him: now the moonlight as he runs
Embraces him—but he must go—is gone.
Ah, once again he turns—thanks, thanks, my love!
He's gone. Oh I'll believe him every word!
I was so young, I loved him so, I had
No mother, God forgot me, and I fell.
There may be pardon yet: all's doubt beyond.
Surely the bitterness of death is past!

ACT II.

SCENE. *The Library.*

Enter LORD TRESHAM hastily.

This way! In, Gerard, quick!

[*As GERARD enters, TRESHAM secures the door.*

Now speak! or, wait—

I'll bid you speak directly.

[*Seats himself.*

Now repeat

Firmly and circumstantially the tale
You just now told me ; it eludes me ; either
I did not listen, or the half is gone
Away from me. How long have you lived here ?
Here in my house, your father kept our woods
Before you ?

Ger. —As his father did, my lord.
I have been eating, sixty years almost,
Your bread.

Tresh. Yes, yes. You ever were of all
The servants in my father's house, I know,
The trusted one. You 'll speak the truth.

Ger. I 'll speak
God's truth. Night after night . . .

Tresh. Since when ?

Ger. At least
A month—each midnight has some man access
To Lady Mildred's chamber.

Tresh. Tusn, "access"—
No wide words like "access" to me !

Ger. He runs
Along the woodside, crosses to the South,
Takes the left tree that ends the avenue . . .

Tresh. The last great yew-tree ?

Ger. You might stand upon
The main boughs like a platform. Then he . . .

Tresh. Quick !

Ger. Climbs up, and, where they lessen at the top,

—I cannot see distinctly, but he throws,
I think—for this I do not vouch—a line
'That reaches to the lady's casement—

Tresh.

—Which

He enters not ! Gerard, some wretched fool
Dares pry into my sister's privacy !
When such are young, it seems a precious thing
To have approached,—to merely have approached,
Got sight of, the abode of her they set
Their frantic thoughts upon ! He does not enter ?
Gerard ?

Ger. There is a lamp that 's full i' the midst,
Under a red square in the painted glass
Of Lady Mildred's . . .

Tresh.

Leave that name out ! Well ?

That lamp ?

Ger. —Is moved at midnight higher up
To one pane—a small dark-blue pane ; he waits
For that among the boughs : at sight of that,
I see him, plain as I see you ; my lord,
Open the lady's casement, enter there . . .

Tresh.—And stay ?

Ger.

An hour, two hours.

Tresh.

And this you saw

Once ?—twice ?—quick !

Ger.

Twenty times.

Tresh.

And what brings you

Under the yew-trees ?

Ger.

The first night I left

My range so far, to track the stranger stag
That broke the pale, I saw the man.

Tresh. Yet sent
No cross-bow shaft through the marauder?

Ger. But
He came, my lord, the first time he was seen,
In a great moonlight, light as any day,
From Lady Mildred's chamber.

Tresh. [after a pause.] You have no cause
—Who could have cause to do my sister wrong?

Ger. Oh my lord, only once—let me this once
Speak what is on my mind! Since first I noted
All this, I've groaned as if a fiery net
Plucked me this way and that—fire, if I turned
To her, fire if I turned to you, and fire,
If down I flung myself and strove to die.
The lady could not have been seven years old
When I was trusted to conduct her safe
Through the deer-herd to stroke the snow-white fawn
I brought to eat bread from her tiny hand
Within a month. She ever had a smile
To greet me with—she . . if it could undo
What's done, to lop each limb from off this trunk . .
All that is foolish talk, not fit for you—
I mean, I could not speak and bring her hurt
For Heaven's compelling. But when I was fixed
To hold my peace, each morsel of your food
Eaten beneath your roof, my birth-place too,
Choked me. I wish I had grown mad in doubts

What it behoved me do. This morn it seemed
 Either I must confess to you, or die :
 Now it is done, I seem the vilest worm
 That crawls, to have betrayed my lady !

Tresh.

No—

No, Gerard !

Ger. Let me go !

Tresh.

A man, you say :

What man ? Young ? Not a vulgar hind ? What dress ?

Ger. A slouched hat and a large dark foreign cloak
 Wraps his whole form ; even his face is hid ;
 But I should judge him young : no hind, be sure !

Tresh. Why ?

Ger. He is ever armed : his sword projects
 Beneath the cloak.

Tresh. Gerard,—I will not say
 No word, no breath of this !

Ger. Thanks, thanks, my lord ! [*Goes.*

TRESHAM paces the room. After a pause,

Oh, thought 's absurd !—as with some monstrous fact
 Which, when ill thoughts beset us, seems to give
 Merciful God that made the sun and stars,
 The waters and the green delights of earth,
 The lie ! I apprehend the monstrous fact—
 Yet know the maker of all worlds is good,
 And yield my reason up, inadequate
 To reconcile what yet I do behold—
 Blasting my sense ! There 's cheerful day outside :
 This is my library, and this the chair

My father used to sit in carelessly
 After his soldier-fashion, while I stood
 Between his knees to question him : and here
 Gerard our grey retainer,—as he says,
 Fed with our food, from sire to son, an age,—
 Has told a story—I am to believe !
 That Mildred . . . oh, no, no ! both tales are true,
 Her pure cheek's story and the forester's !
 Would she, or could she, err—much less, confound
 All guilts of treachery, of craft, of . . . Heaven
 Keep me within its hand !—I will sit here
 Until thought settle and I see my course.
 Avert, oh God, only this woe from me !

*[As he sinks his head between his arms on the table,
 GUENDOLEN'S voice is heard at the door.]*

Lord Tresham ! *[She knocks.]* Is Lord Tresham there ?

*[TRESHAM, hastily turning, pulls down the first book
 above him and opens it.]*

Tresh.

Come in !

[She enters.]

Ha Guendolen—good morning.

Guen.

Nothing more ?

Tresh. What should I say more ?

Guen.

Pleasant question ! more ?

This more. Did I besiege poor Mildred's brain
 Last night till close on morning with "the Earl,"
 "The Earl"—whose worth did I asseverate
 Till I am very fain to hope that . . . Thorold,
 What is all this ? You are not well !

Tresh.

Who I ?

You laugh at me.

Guen. Has what I 'm fain to hope,
Arrived then? Does that huge tome show some blot
In the Earl's 'scutcheon come no longer back
'Than Arthur's time?

Tresh. When left you Mildred's chamber?

Guen. Oh late enough, I told you! The main thing
To ask is, how I left her chamber,—sure,
Content yourself, she 'll grant this paragon
Of Earls no such ungracious . . .

Tresh. Send her here!

Guen. Thorold?

Tresh. I mean—acquaint her, Guendolen,
—But mildly!

Guen. Mildly?

Tresh. Ah, you guessed aright!

I am not well: there is no hiding it.
But tell her I would see her at her leisure—
That is, at once! here in the library!
The passage in that old Italian book
We hunted for so long is found, say, found—
And if I let it slip again . . you see,
That she must come —and instantly!

Guen. I 'll die
Piecemeal, record that, if there have not gloomed
Some blot i' the 'scutcheon!

Tresh. Go! or, Guendolen,
Be you at call,—with Austin, if you choose,—
In the adjoining gallery! There go! [*GUENDOLEN goes.*]
Another lesson to me! You might bid

A child disguise his heart's sore, and conduct
 Some sly investigation point by point
 With a smooth brow, as well as bid me catch
 The inquisitorial cleverness some praise !
 If you had told me yesterday, "There 's one
 " You needs must circumvent and practise with,
 " Entrap by policies, if you would worm
 " The truth out : and that one is—Mildred !" There,
 'There—reasoning is thrown away on it !
 Prove she 's unchaste . . why, you may after prove
 That she 's a poisoner, traitress, what you will !
 Where I can comprehend nought, nought 's to say.
 Or do, or think ! Force on me but the first
 Abomination,—then outpour all plagues,
 And I shall ne'er make count of them !

Enter MILDRED.

Mil.

What book

Is it I wanted, Thorold ? Guendolen
 Thought you were pale ; you are not pale. That book ?
 That 's Latin surely.

Tresh.

Mildred, here 's a line,

(Don't lean on me : I'll English it for you)

" Love conquers all things." What love conquers
 them ?

What love should you esteem—best love ?

Mil.

True love.

Tresh. I mean, and should have said, whose love is
 best

Of all that love or that profess to love ?

Mil. The list 's so long : there 's father's, mother's,
husband's . . .

Tresh. Mildred, I do believe a brother's love
For a sole sister must exceed them all.
For see now, only see ! there 's no alloy
Of earth that creeps into the perfect'st gold
Of other loves—no gratitude to claim ;
You never gave her life, not even aught
That keeps life—never tended her, instructed,
Enriched her—so your love can claim no right
O'er her save pure love's claim : that 's what I call
Freedom from earthliness. You 'll never hope
To be such friends, for instance, she and you,
As when you hunted cowslips in the woods
Or played together in the meadow hay.
Oh yes—with age, respect comes, and your worth
Is felt, there 's growing sympathy of tastes,
There 's ripened friendship, there 's confirmed esteem :
—Much head these make against the new comer !
The startling apparition, the strange youth—
Whom one half-hour's conversing with, or, say,
Mere gazing at, shall change (beyond all change
This Ovid ever sang about) your soul
. . . Her soul, that is,—the sister's soul ! With her .
'T was winter yesterday ; now, all is warmth,
The green leaf 's springing and the turtle's voice,
“ Arise and come away ! ” Come whither ?—far
Enough from the esteem, respect, and all
The brother 's somewhat insignificant

Array of rights ! All which he knows before,
 Has calculated on so long ago !
 I think such love, (apart from yours and mine,)
 Contented with its little term of life,
 Intending to retire betimes, aware
 How soon the background must be place for it,
 —I think, am sure, a brother's love exceeds
 All the world's love in its unworldliness.

Mil. What is this for ?

Tresh.

'This, Mildred, is it for !

Or, no, I cannot go to it so soon !
 That 's one of many points my haste left out—
 Each day, each hour throws forth its silk-slight film
 Between the being tied to you by birth,
 And you, until those slender threads compose
 A web that shrouds her daily life of hopes
 And fears and fancies, all her life, from yours :
 So close you live and yet so far apart !
 And must I rend this web, tear up, break down
 The sweet and palpitating mystery
 That makes her sacred ? You—for you I mean,
 Shall I speak, shall I not speak ?

Mil.

Speak !

Tresh.

I will.

Is there a story men could—any man
 Could tell of you, you would conceal from me ?
 I 'll never think there 's falsehood on that lip.
 Say "There is no such story men could tell,"
 And I 'll believe you, though I disbelieve

The world—the world of better men than I,
And women such as I suppose you. Speak !
[*After a pause.*] Not speak ? Explain then ! Clear it up
then ! Move

Some of the miserable weight away
That presses lower than the grave ! Not speak ?
Some of the dead weight, Mildred ! Ah, if I
Could bring myself to plainly make their charge
Against you ! Must I, Mildred ? Silent still ?
[*After a pause.*] Is there a gallant that has night by night
Admittance to your chamber ?

[*After a pause.*] Then, his name !
Till now, I only had a thought for you :
But now,—his name !

Mil. Thorold, do you devise
Fit expiation for my guilt, if fit
There be ! 'T is nought to say that I 'll endure
And bless you,—that my spirit yearns to purge
Her stains off in the fierce renewing fire :
But do not plunge me into other guilt !
Oh, guilt enough ! I cannot tell his name.

Tresh. Then judge yourself ! How should I act ?
Pronounce !

Mil. Oh, Thorold, you must never tempt me thus !
To die here in this chamber by that sword
Would seem like punishment : so should I glide,
Like an arch-cheat, into extremest bliss !
'T were easily arranged for me : but you—
What would become of you ?

Tresh. . And what will now
 Become of me? I'll hide your shame and mine
 From every eye; the dead must heave their hearts
 Under the marble of our chapel-floor;
 'They cannot rise and blast you. You may wed
 Your paramour above our mother's tomb;
 Our mother cannot move from 'neath your foot.
 We too will somehow wear this one day out:
 But with to-morrow hastens here—the Earl!
 'The youth without suspicion that faces come
 From heaven, and hearts from . . . whence proceed such
 hearts?

I have dispatched last night at your command
 A missive bidding him present himself
 To-morrow—here—thus much is said; the rest
 Is understood as if 't were written down—
 “His suit finds favour in your eyes:”—now dictate
 This morning's letter that shall countermand
 Last night's—do dictate that!

Mil. But Thorold—if
 I will receive him as I said?

Tresh. The Earl?

Mil. I will receive him.

Tresh. [*Starting up.*] Ho there! Guendolen!

GUENDOLEN and AUSTIN enter.

And, Austin, you are welcome, too! Look there!
 The woman there!

Aus. & Guen. How? Mildred?

Tresh. Mildred once!

Now the receiver night by night, when sleep
 Blesses the inmates of her father's house,
 --I say, the soft sly wanton that receives
 Her guilt's accomplice 'neath this roof which holds
 You, Guendolen, you, Austin, and has held
 A thousand Treshams—never one like her !
 No lighter of the signal-lamp her quick
 Foul breath near quenches in hot eagerness
 To mix with breath as foul ! no loosener
 O' the lattice, practised in the stealthy tread,
 The low voice and the noiseless come-and-go !
 Not one composer of the bacchant's mien
 Into—what you thought Mildred's, in a word !
 Know her !

Guen. Oh Mildred, look to me, at least !
 Thorold—she 's dead, I 'd say, but that she stands
 Rigid as stone and whiter !

Tresh. You have heard . . .

Guen. Too much ! You must proceed no further.

Mil. Yes—

Proceed ! All 's truth. Go from me !

Tresh. All is truth,
 She tells you ! Well, you know, or ought to know,
 All this I would forgive in her. I 'd con
 Each precept the harsh world enjoins, I 'd take
 Our ancestors' stern verdicts one by one,
 I 'd bind myself before them to exact
 The prescribed vengeance—and one word of hers,
 The sight of her, the bare least memory

Of Mildred, my one sister, my heart's pride
Above all prides, my all in all so long,
Would scatter every trace of my resolve.
What were it silently to waste away
And see her waste away from this day forth,
Two scathed things with leisure to repent,
And grow acquainted with the grave, and die
Tired out if not at peace, and be forgotten?
It were not so impossible to bear.
But this—that, fresh from last night's pledge renewed
Of love with the successful gallant there,
She calmly bids me help her to entice,
Inveigle an unconscious trusting youth
Who thinks her all that 's chaste and good and pure,
—Invites me to betray him . . . who so fit
As honour's self to cover shame's arch-deed?
—That she 'll receive Lord Mertoun—(her own phrase)—
This, who could bear? Why, you have heard of thieves,
Stabbers, the earth's disgrace, who yet have laughed,
“Talk not to me of torture—I 'll betray
“No comrade I 've pledged faith to!”—you have heard
Of wretched women—all but Mildreds—tied
By wild illicit ties to losels vile
You 'd tempt them to forsake; and they 'll reply
“Gold, friends, repute, I left for him, I find
“In him, why should I leave him then for gold,
“Repute or friends?”—and you have felt your heart
Respond to such poor outcasts of the world
As to so many friends; bad as you please.

You 've felt they were God's men and women still,
 So, not to be disowned by you. But she
 That stands there, calmly gives her lover up
 As means to wed the Earl that she may hide
 Their intercourse the surelier : and, for this,
 I curse her to her face before you all.
 Shame hunt her from the earth ! Then Heaven do right
 To both ! It hears me now—shall judge her then !

[As MILDRED faints and falls, TRESHAM rushes out.]

Aus. Stay, Tresham, we 'll accompany you !

Guen.

We ?

What, and leave Mildred ? We ? Why, where 's my
 place

But by her side, and where yours but by mine ?
 Mildred—one word ! Only look at me, then !

Aus. No, Guendolen ! I echo Thorold's voice.
 She is unworthy to behold . . .

Guen.

Us two ?

If you spoke on reflection, and if I
 Approved your speech—if you (to put the thing
 At lowest) you the soldier, bound to make
 The king's cause yours and fight for it, and throw
 Regard to others of its right or wrong,
 —If with a death-white woman you can help,
 Let alone sister, let alone a Mildred,
 You left her—or if I, her cousin, friend
 This morning, playfellow but yesterday,
 Who said, or thought at least a thousand times,
 " I 'd serve you if I could," should now face round
 And say, " Ah that 's to only signify

" I 'd serve you while you 're fit to serve yourself—
 " So long as fifty eyes await the turn
 " Of yours to forestall its yet half-formed wish,
 " I 'll proffer my assistance you 'll not need—
 " When every tongue is praising you, I 'll join
 " The praisers' chorus—when you 're hemmed about
 " With lives between you and detraction—lives
 " To be laid down if a rude voice, rash eye,
 " Rough hand should violate the sacred ring
 " Their worship throws about you,—then indeed,
 " Who 'll stand up for you stout as I ? " If so
 We said, and so we did,—not Mildred there
 Would be unworthy to behold us both,
 But we should be unworthy, both of us,
 To be beheld by—by—your meanest dog,
 Which, if that sword were broken in your face
 Before a crowd, that badge torn off your breast,
 And you cast out with hooting and contempt,
 —Would push his way thro' all the hooters, gain
 Your side, go off with you and all your shame
 To the next ditch you choose to die in ! Austin,
 Do you love me ? Here's Austin, Mildred,—here 's
 Your brother says he does not believe half—
 No, nor half that—of all he heard ! He says,
 Look up and take his hand !

Aus.

Look up and take

My hand, dear Mildred !

Mil.

I—I was so young !

Beside, I loved him, Thorold—and I had
 No mother ; God forgot me : so I fell.

Guen. Mildred !

Mil. Require no further ! Did I dream
That I could palliate what is done ? All 's true.
Now, punish me ! A woman takes my hand ?
Let go my hand ! You do not know, I see.
I thought that Thorold told you.

Guen. What is this ?
Where start you to ?

Mil. Oh Austin, loosen me !
You heard the whole of it—your eyes were worse,
In their surprise, than Thorold's ! Oh, unless
You stay to execute his sentence, loose
My hand ! Has Thorold gone, and are you here ?

Guen. Here, Mildred, we two friends of yours will
wait
Your bidding ; be you silent, sleep or muse !
Only, when you shall want your bidding done,
How can we do it if we are not by ?
Here 's Austin waiting patiently your will !
One spirit to command, and one to love
And to believe in it and do its best,
Poor as that is, to help it—why, the world
Has been won many a time, its length and breadth,
By just such a beginning !

Mil. I believe
If once I threw my arms about your neck
And sunk my head upon your breast, that I
Should weep again.

Guen. Let go her hand now, Austin !

Wait for me. Pace the gallery and think
On the world's seemings and realities,
Until I call you.

[AUSTIN goes.]

Mil. No—I cannot weep.

No more tears from this brain—no sleep—no tears !
O Guendolen, I love you !

Guen. Yes : and “ love ”

Is a short word that says so very much !
It says that you confide in me.

Mil. Confide !

Guen. Your lover's name, then ! I 've so much to
learn,
Ere I can work in your behalf !

Mil. My friend,

You know I cannot tell his name.

Guen. At least

He is your lover ? and you love him too ?

Mil. Ah, do you ask me that ?—but I am fallen
So low !

Guen. You love him still, then ?

Mil. My sole prop

Against the guilt that crushes me ! I say,
Each night ere I lie down, “ I was so young—
“ I had no mother, and I loved him so ! ”
And then God seems indulgent, and I dare
Trust him my soul in sleep.

Guen. How could you let us

E'en talk to you about Lord Mertoun then ?

Mil. There is a cloud around me.

Guen.

But you said

You would receive his suit in spite of this?

Mil. I say there is a cloud . . .*Guen.*

No cloud to me !

Lord Mertoun and your lover are the same !

Mil. What maddest fancy . . .*Guen.* [*calling aloud.*] Austin ! (spare your pains—
When I have got a truth, that truth I keep)—*Mil.* By all you love, sweet Guendolen, forbear !
Have I confided in you . . .*Guen.*

Just for this !

Austin !—Oh, not to guess it at the first !

But I did guess it—that is, I divined,

Felt by an instinct how it was : why else

Should I pronounce you free from all that heap

Of sins which had been irredeemable ?

I felt they were not yours—what other way

Than this, not yours ? The secret 's wholly mine !

Mil. If you would see me die before his face . . .*Guen.* I 'd hold my peace ! And if the Earl returns
To-night ?*Mil.* Ah Heaven, he 's lost !*Guen.*

I thought so. Austin !

Enter AUSTIN.

Oh, where have you been hiding ?

Aus.

Thorold 's gone,

I know not how, across the meadow-land,

I watched him till I lost him in the skirts

O' the beech-wood.

Guen. Gone? All thwarts us.

Mil. Thorold too?

Guen. I have thought. First lead this Mildred to her room.

Go on the other side ; and then we 'll seek
Your brother : and I 'll tell you, by the way,
The greatest comfort in the world. You said
There was a clue to all. Remember, Sweet,
He said there was a clue ! I hold it. Come !

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The end of the Yew-tree Avenue under MILDRED'S window. A light seen through a central red pane*

Enter TRESHAM through the trees.

Again here ! But I cannot lose myself.
The heath—the orchard—I have traversed glades
And dells and bosky paths which used to lead
Into green wild-wood depths, bewildering
My boy's adventurous step. And now they tend
Hither or soon or late ; the blackest shade
Breaks up, the thronged trunks of the trees ope wide,
And the dim turret I have fled from, fronts
Again my step ; the very river put
Its arm about me and conducted me
To this detested spot. Why then, I 'll shun
Their will no longer : do your will with me !
Oh, bitter ! To have reared a towering scheme

Of happiness, and to behold it razed,
 Were nothing : all men hope, and see their hopes
 Frustrate, and grieve awhile, and hope anew.
 But I . . to hope that from a line like ours
 No horrid prodigy like this would spring,
 Were just as though I hoped that from these old
 Confederates against the sovereign day,
 Children of older and yet older sires,
 Whose living coral berries dropped, as now
 On me, on many a baron's surcoat once,
 On many a beauty's whimple—would proceed
 No poison-tree, to thrust, from hell its root,
 Hither and thither its strange snaky arms.
 Why came I here? What must I do? [*a bell strikes.*]

A bell?

Midnight ! and 't is at midnight . . . Ah, I catch
 —Woods, river, plains, I catch your meaning now,
 And I obey you ! Hist ! This tree will serve.

[*He retires behind one of the trees. After a pause, enter
 MERTOUN cloaked as before.*]

Mer. Not time ! Beat out thy last voluptuous beat
 Of hope and fear, my heart ! I thought the clock
 I' the chapel struck as I was pushing through
 The ferns. And so I shall no more see rise
 My love-star ! Oh, no matter for the past !
 So much the more delicious task to watch
 Mildred revive : to pluck out, thorn by thorn,
 All traces of the rough forbidden path
 My rash love lured her to ! Each day must see

Some fear of hers effaced, some hope renewed :
Then there will be surprises, unforeseen
Delights in store. I 'll not regret the past.

[The light is placed above in the purple pane.]

And see, my signal rises, Mildred's star !
I never saw it lovelier than now
It rises for the last time. If it sets,
'T is that the re-assuring sun may dawn.

*[As he prepares to ascend the last tree of the avenue,
TRESHAM arrests his arm.]*

Unhand me—peasant, by your grasp ! Here's gold.
'T was a mad freak of mine. I said I 'd pluck
A branch from the white-blossomed shrub beneath
The casement there. Take this, and hold your peace.

Tresh. Into the moonlight yonder, come with me !
—Out of the shadow !

Mer. I am armed, fool !

Tresh. Yes,

Or no ? You 'll come into the light, or no ?
My hand is on your throat—refuse !—

Mer. That voice !

Where have I heard . . . no—that was mild and slow.

I 'll come with you. *[They advance.]*

Tresh. You're armed : that's well. Declare
Your name—who are you ?

Mer. (Tresham !—she is lost !)

Tresh. Oh, silent ? Do you know, you bear yourself
Exactly as, in curious dreams I 've had
How felons, this wild earth is full of, look

When they 're detected, still your kind has looked !
 The bravo holds an assured countenance,
 The thief is voluble and plausible,
 But silently the slave of lust has crouched
 When I have fancied it before a man.
 Your name ?

Mer. I do conjure Lord Tresham—ay,
 Kissing his foot, if so I might prevail—
 That he for his own sake forbear to ask
 My name ! As heaven 's above, his future weal
 Or woe depends upon my silence ! Vain !
 I read your white inexorable face.
 Know me, Lord Tresham ! [*He throws off his disguises.*

Tresh. Mertoun !

[*After a pause.*] Draw now !

Mer. Hear me

But speak first !

Tresh. Not one least word on your life !
 Be sure that I will strangle in your throat
 The least word that informs me how you live
 And yet seem what you seem ! No doubt 't was you
 Taught Mildred still to keep that face and sin.
 We should join hands in frantic sympathy
 If you once taught me the unteachable,
 Explained how you can live so, and so lie.
 With God's help I retain, despite my sense,
 The old belief—a life like yours is still
 Impossible. Now draw !

Mer. Not for my sake,

Do I entreat a hearing—for your sake,
And most, for her sake !

Tresh. Ha ha, what should I
Know of your ways ? A miscreant like yourself,
How must one rouse his ire ? A blow ?—that 's pride
No doubt, to him ! One spurns him, does one not ?
Or sets the foot upon his mouth, or spits
Into his face ! Come ! Which, or all of these ?

Mer. 'T wixt him and me and Mildred, Heaven be
judge !

Can I avoid this ? Have your will, my lord !

[He draws and, after a few passes, falls.]

Tresh. You are not hurt ?

Mer. You 'll hear me now !

Tresh. But rise !

Mer. Ah Tresham, say I not “you 'll hear me now !”
And what procures a man the right to speak
In his defence before his fellow-man,
But—I suppose—the thought that presently
He may have leave to speak before his God
His whole defence ?

Tresh. Not hurt ? It cannot be !
You made no effort to resist me. Where
Did my sword reach you ? Why not have returned
My thrusts ? Hurt where ?

Mer. My lord—

Tresh. How young he is !

Mer. Lord Tresham, I am very young, and yet
I have entangled other lives with mine.

Do let me speak, and do believe my speech !
That when I die before you presently,—

Tresh. Can you stay here till I return with help ?

Mer. Oh, stay by me ! When I was less than boy
I did you grievous wrong and knew it not—
Upon my honour, knew it not ! Once known,
I could not find what seemed a better way
To right you than I took : my life—you feel
How less than nothing were the giving you
The life you 've taken ! But I thought my way
The better—only for your sake and hers :
And as you have decided otherwise,
Would I had an infinity of lives
To offer you ! Now say—instruct me—think
Can you from the brief minutes I have left
Eke out my reparation ? Oh think—think !
For I must wring a partial—dare I say,
Forgiveness from you, ere I die ?

Tresh.

I do

Forgive you.

Mer. Wait and ponder that great word !
Because, if you forgive me, I shall hope
To speak to you of—Mildred !

Tresh.

Mertoun, haste

And anger have undone us. 'T is not you
Should tell me for a novelty you 're young,
Thoughtless, unable to recall the past.
Be but your pardon ample as my own !

Mer. Ah Tresham, that a sword-stroke and a drop

Of blood or two, should bring all this about !
Why, 't was my very fear of you, my love
Of you—(what passion like a boy's for one
Like you?)—that ruined me ! I dreamed of you —
You, all accomplished, courted everywhere,
The scholar and the gentleman. I burned
To knit myself to you : but I was young,
And your surpassing reputation kept me
So far aloof ! Oh, wherefore all that love ?
With less of love, my glorious yesterday
Of praise and gentlest words and kindest looks,
Had taken place perchance six months ago.
Even now, how happy we had been ! And yet
I know the thought of this escaped you, Tresham !
Let me look up into your face ; I feel
'T is changed above me : yet my eyes are glazed.
Where ? where ?

[As he endeavours to raise himself, his eye catches the lamp.

Ah, Mildred ! What will Mildred do ?

Tresham, her life is bound up in the life
That 's bleeding fast away ! I 'll live—must live,
There, if you 'll only turn me I shall live
And save her ! Tresham—oh, had you but heard !
Had you but heard ! What right was yours to set
The thoughtless foot upon her life and mine,
And then say, as we perish, “ Had I thought,
“ All had gone otherwise ? ” We 've sinned and die :
Never you sin, Lord Tresham ! for you 'll die,
And God will judge you.

Tresh.

Yes, be satisfied !

That process is begun.

Mer.

And she sits there

Waiting for me ! Now, say you this to her—

You, not another—say, I saw him die

As he breathed this, “ I love her ”—you don't know

What those three small words mean ! Say, loving her

Lowers me down the bloody slope to death

With memories . . . I speak to her, not you,

Who had no pity, will have no remorse,

Perchance intend her . . . Die along with me,

Dear Mildred ! 't is so easy, and you 'll 'scape

So much unkindness ! Can I lie at rest,

With rude speech spoken to you, ruder deeds

Done to you ?—heartless men shall have my heart,

And I tied down with grave-clothes and the worm,

Aware, perhaps, of every blow—oh God !—

Upon those lips—yet of no power to tear

The felon stripe by stripe ! Die, Mildred ! Leave

Their honourable world to them ! For God

We 're good enough, though the world casts us out.

*[A whistle is heard]**Tresh.* Ho, Gerard !*Enter GERARD, AUSTIN and GUENDOLEN, with lights.*

No one speak ! You see what 's done.

I cannot bear another voice.

Mer.

There 's light--

Light all about me, and I move to it.

Tresham, did I not tell you—did you not

Just promise to deliver words of mine
To Mildred?

Tresh. I will bear those words to her.

Mer. Now?

Tresh. Now. Lift you the body, and leave me
The head.

[*As they have half raised MERTOUN, he turns suddenly.*

Mer. I knew they turned me : turn me not from her !
There ! stay you ! there ! [Dies.

Guen. [*after a pause.*] Austin, remain you here
With Thorold until Gerard comes with help :
Then lead him to his chamber. I must go
To Mildred.

Tresh. Guendolen, I hear each word
You utter. Did you hear him bid me give
His message? Did you hear my promise? I,
And only I, see Mildred.

Guen. She will die.

Tresh. Oh no, she will not die ! I dare not hope
She 'll die. What ground have you to think she 'll die?
Why, Austin 's with you !

Aus. Had we but arrived
Before you fought !

Tresh. There was no fight at all.
He let me slaughter him—the boy ! I 'll trust
The body there to you and Gerard—thus !
Now bear him on before me.

Aus. Whither bear him ?

Tresh. Oh, to my chamber! When we meet there
next,

We shall be friends.

[*They bear out the body of MERTOUN.*

Will she die, Guendolen?

Guen. Where are you taking me?

Tresh. He fell just here.

Now answer me. Shall you in your whole life
—You who have nought to do with Mertoun's fate,
Now you have seen his breast upon the turf,
Shall you e'er walk this way if you can help?
When you and Austin wander arm-in-arm
Through our ancestral grounds, will not a shade
Be ever on the meadow and the waste—
Another kind of shade than when the night
Shuts the woodside with all its whispers up?
But will you ever so forget his breast
As carelessly to cross this bloody turf
Under the black yew avenue? That's well!
You turn your head: and I then?—

Guen. What is done

Is done. My care is for the living. Thorold,
Bear up against this burden: more remains
To set the neck to!

Tresh. Dear and ancient trees
My fathers planted, and I loved so well!
What have I done that, like some fabled crime
Of yore, lets loose a fury leading thus
Her miserable dance amidst you all?

Oh, never more for me shall winds intone
With all your tops a vast antiphony,
Demanding and responding in God's praise !
Hers ye are now, not mine ! Farewell—farewell !

SCENE II.—MILDRED'S *Chamber*. MILDRED *alone*.

He comes not ! I have heard of those who seemed
Resourceless in prosperity,—you thought
Sorrow might slay them when she listed ; yet
Did they so gather up their diffused strength
At her first menace, that they bade her strike,
And stood and laughed her subtlest skill to scorn.
Oh, 't is not so with me ! The first woe fell,
And the rest fall upon it, not on me :
Else should I bear that Henry comes not ?—fails
Just this first night out of so many nights ?
Loving is done with. Were he sitting now,
As so few hours since, on that seat, we 'd love
No more—contrive no thousand happy ways
To hide love from the loveless, any more.
I think I might have urged some little point
In my defence, to Thorold ; he was breathless
For the least hint of a defence : but no,
The first shame over, all that would might fall.
No Henry ! Yet I merely sit and think
The morn's deed o'er and o'er. I must have crept
Out of myself. A Mildred that has lost

Her lover—oh I dare not look upon
Such woe ! I crouch away from it ! 'T is she,
Mildred, will break her heart, not I ! The world
Forsakes me : only Henry 's left me—left ?
When I have lost him, for he does not come,
And I sit stupidly . . . Oh Heaven, break up
This worse than anguish, this mad apathy,
By any means or any messenger !

Tresh. [*without.*] Mildred !

Mil. Come in ! Heaven hears me !

[*Enter TRESHAM.*] You ? alone ?

Oh, no more cursing !

Tresh. Mildred, I must sit.

There—you sit !

Mil. Say it, Thorold—do not look

The curse ! deliver all you come to say !

What must become of me ? Oh speak that thought

Which makes your brow and cheek so pale !

Tresh. My thought ?

Mil. All of it !

Tresh. How we waded—years ago—

After those water-lilies, till the splash,

I know not how, surprised us ; and you dared

Neither advance nor turn back : so, we stood

Laughing and crying until Gerard came—

Once safe upon the turf, the loudest too,

For once more reaching the relinquished prize !

How idle thoughts are, some men's, dying men's !

Mildred,—

Mil. You call me kindlier by my name
Than even yesterday : what is in that ?

Tresh. It weighs so much upon my mind that I
This morning took an office not my own !
I might . . of course, I must be glad or grieved,
Content or not, at every little thing
That touches you. I may with a wrung heart
Even reprove you, Mildred ; I did more :
Will you forgive me ?

Mil. Thorold ? do you mock ?
Or no . . and yet you bid me . . say that word !

Tresh. Forgive me, Mildred !—are you silent, Sweet ?

Mil. [*starting up.*] Why does not Henry Mertoun
come to-night ?
Are you, too, silent ?

*[Dashing his mantle aside, and pointing to his scabbard,
which is empty.]*

Ah, this speaks for you !
You 've murdered Henry Mertoun ! Now proceed !
What is it I must pardon ? This and all ?
Well, I do pardon you—I think I do.
Thorold, how very wretched you must be !

Tresh. He bade me tell you . .

Mil. What I do forbid
Your utterance of ! So much that you may tell
And will not—how you murdered him . . but, no !
You 'll tell me that he loved me, never more
Than bleeding out his life there : must I say
“ Indeed,” to that ? Enough ! I pardon you.

Tresh. You cannot, Mildred ! for the harsh words, yes :
Of this last deed Another 's judge : whose doom
I wait in doubt, despondency and fear.

Mil. Oh, true ! There 's nought for me to pardon !
True !

You loose my soul of all its cares at once.
Death makes me sure of him for ever ! You
Tell me his last words ? He shall tell me them,
And take my answer—not in words, but reading
Himself the heart I had to read him late,
Which death . . .

Tresh. Death ? You are dying too ? Well said
Of Guendolen ! I dared not hope you 'd die :
But she was sure of it.

Mil. Tell Guendolen
I loved her, and tell Austin . . .

Tresh. Him you loved :
And me ?

Mil. Ah Thorold ! Was 't not rashly done
To quench that blood, on fire with youth and hope
And love of me—whom you loved too, and yet
Suffered to sit here waiting his approach
While you were slaying him ? Oh doubtlessly
You let him speak his poor confused boy's-speech
—Do his poor utmost to disarm your wrath
And respite me !—you let him try to give
The story of our love and ignorance,
And the brief madness and the long despair—
You let him plead all this, because your code

Of honour bids you hear before you strike :
But at the end, as he looked up for life
Into your eyes—you struck him down !

Tresh.

No ! no !

Had I but heard him—had I let him speak
Half the truth—less—had I looked long on him
I had desisted ! Why, as he lay there,
The moon on his flushed cheek, I gathered all
The story ere he told it : I saw through
The troubled surface of his crime and yours
A depth of purity immovable,
Had I but glanced, where all seemed turbidest
Had gleamed some inlet to the calm beneath ;
I would not glance : my punishment 's at hand.
There, Mildred, is the truth ! and you—say on—
You curse me ?

Mil.

As I dare approach that Heaven
Which has not bade a living thing despair,
Which needs no code to keep its grace from stain,
But bids the vilest worm that turns on it
Desist and be forgiven,—I—forgive not,
But bless you, Thorold, from my soul of souls !

[*Falls on his neck.*]

There ! Do not think too much upon the past !
The cloud that 's broke was all the same a cloud
While it stood up between my friend and you ;
You hurt him 'neath its shadow : but is that
So past retrieve ? I have his heart, you know ;
I may dispose of it : I give it you !

It loves you as mine loves ! Confirm me, Henry ! [*Dies.*

Tresh. I wish thee joy, Beloved ! I am glad
In thy full gladness !

Guen. [*without.*] Mildred ! Tresham !

[*Entering with AUSTIN.*]

Thorold,

I could desist no longer. Ah, she swoons !

That 's well.

Tresh. Oh, better far than that !

Guen. She 's dead !

Let me unlock her arms !

Tresh. She threw them thus

About my neck, and blessed me, and then died :

You 'll let them stay now, Guendolen !

Aus. Leave her

And look to him ! What ails you, Thorold ?

Guen. White

As she, and whiter ! Austin ! quick—this side !

Aus. A froth is oozing through his clenched teeth ;
Both lips, where they 're not bitten through, are black :
Speak, dearest Thorold !

Tresh. Something does weigh down
My neck beside her weight : thanks : I should fall
But for you, Austin, I believe !—there, there,
'T will pass away soon !—ah,—I had forgotten :
I am dying.

Guen. Thorold—Thorold—why was this ?

Tresh. I said, just as I drank the poison off,
The earth would be no longer earth to me,
The life out of all life was gone from me.

There are blind ways provided, the foredone
Heart-weary player in this pageant-world
Drops out by, letting the main masque defile
By the conspicuous portal : I am through—
Just through !

Guen. Don't leave him, Austin ! Death is close.

Tresh. Already Mildred's face is peacefuller.

I see you, Austin—feel you : here 's my hand,
Put yours in it—you, Guendolen, yours too !
You 're lord and lady now—you 're Treshams ; name
And fame are yours : you hold our 'scutcheon up.
Austin, no blot on it ! You see how blood
Must wash one blot away : the first blot came
And the first blood came. To the vain world's eye
All 's gules again : no care to the vain world,
From whence the red was drawn !

Aus. No blot shall come !

Tresh. I said that : yet it did come. Should it come,
Vengeance is God's, not man's. Remember me !

[*Dies.*

Guen. [*letting fall the pulseless arm.*] Ah Thorold, we
can but—remember you !

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

A PLAY.

*“Ivy and violet, what do ye here
With blossom and shoot in the warm spring-weather,
Hiding the arms of Monchenci and Vere?”—HANMER.*

NO ONE LOVES AND HONOURS BARRY CORNWALL MORE THAN
DOES ROBERT BROWNING ;
WHO, HAVING NOTHING BETTER THAN THIS PLAY TO
GIVE HIM IN PROOF OF IT,
MUST SAY SO.

London, 1844.

PERSONS.

COLOMBE OF RAVESTEIN, Duchess of Juliers and Cleves.

SABYNE, ADOLF, her Attendants.

GUIBERT, GAUCELME, MAUFROY, CLUGNET, Courtiers.

VALENCE, Advocate of Cleves.

PRINCE BERTHOLD, Claimant of the Duchy.

MELCHIOR, his Confidant.

PLACE, *The Palace at Juliers.*

TIME, 16—.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY.

ACT I.

Morning.—SCENE. *A corridor leading to the Audience-chamber.*

GAUCELME, CLUGNET, MAUFROY *and other Courtiers, round*
GUIBERT *who is silently reading a paper: as he drops it at*
the end—

Gui. That this should be her birthday ; and the day
We all invested her, twelve months ago,
As the late Duke's true heiress and our liege ;
And that this also must become the day . .
Oh, miserable lady !

1st Court. Ay, indeed ?

2nd Court. Well, Guibert ?

3rd Court. But your news, my friend, your news !
The sooner, friend, one learns Prince Berthold's pleasure,
The better for us all : how writes the Prince ?
Give me ! I 'll read it for the common good.

Gui. In time, sir,—but till time comes, pardon me !
Our old Duke just disclosed his child's retreat,
Declared her true succession to his rule,
And died : this birthday was the day, last year,
We convoyed her from Castle Ravestein—

'That sleeps out trustfully its extreme age
On the Meuse' quiet bank, where she lived queen
Over the water-buds,—to Juliers' court
With joy and bustle. Here again we stand ;
Sir Gaucelme's buckle 's constant to his cap :
To-day 's much such another sunny day !

Gau. Come, Guibert, this outgrows a jest, I think !
You 're hardly such a novice as to need
The lesson, you pretend

Gui. What lesson, sir ?
That everybody, if he 'd thrive at court,
Should, first and last of all, look to himself ?
Why, no : and therefore with your good example,
(—Ho, Master Adolf !)—to myself I 'll look.

Enter ADOLF.

Gui. The Prince's letter ; why, of all men else
Comes it to me ?

Adolf. By virtue of your place,
Sir Guibert ! 'T was the Prince's express charge,
His envoy told us, that the missive there
Should only reach our lady by the hand
Of whosoever held your place.

Gui. Enough ! [*ADOLF retires.*]
Then, gentles, who 'll accept a certain poor
Indifferently honourable place,
My friends, I make no doubt, have gnashed their teeth
At leisure minutes these half-dozen years,
To find me never in the mood to quit ?

—Who asks may have it, with my blessing, and—
 This to present our lady. Who 'll accept?
 You,—you,—you? There it lies, and may, for me!

Mau. [*a youth, picking up the paper, reads aloud.*]

“ Prince Berthold, proved by titles following
 “ Undoubted Lord of Juliers, comes this day
 “ To claim his own, with licence from the Pope,
 “ The Emperor, the Kings of Spain and France ”. .

Gau. Sufficient “ titles following,” I judge!
 Don't read another! Well,—“ to claim his own? ”

Mau. “—And take possession of the Duchy held
 “ Since twelve months, to the true heir's prejudice,
 “ By ” . . . Colombe, Juliers' mistress, so she thinks,
 And Ravestein's mere lady, as we find!

Who wants the place and paper? Guibert's right.
 I hope to climb a little in the world,—

I'd push my fortunes,—but, no more than he,
 Could tell her on this happy day of days,
 That, save the nosegay in her hand, perhaps,
 There's nothing left to call her own. Sir Clugnet,
 You famish for promotion; what say you?

Clug. [*an old man.*] To give this letter were a sort, I
 take it,

Of service: services ask recompense:

What kind of corner may be Ravestein?

Gui. The castle?—Oh, you'd share her fortunes?

Good!

Three walls stand upright, full as good as four,
 With no such bad remainder of a roof.

Clug. Oh,—but the town?

Gui.

Five houses, fifteen huts,

A church whereto was once a spire, 't is judged ;

And half a dyke, except in time of thaw.

Clug. Still, there 's some revenue?

Gui.

Else Heaven forfend !

You hang a beacon out, should fogs increase ;

So, when the Autumn floats of pine-wood steer

Safe 'mid the white confusion, thanks to you,

Their grateful raftsmen flings a guilder in ;

—That 's if he mean to pass your way next time.

Clug. If not?

Gui.

Hang guilders, then—he blesses you !

Clug. What man do you suppose me? Keep your
paper !

And, let me say, it shows no handsome spirit

To dally with misfortune : keep your place !

Gau. Some one must tell her.

Gui.

Some one may : you may !

Gau. Sir Guibert, 't is no trifle turns me sick

Of court-hypocrisy at years like mine,

But this goes near it. Where 's there news at all?

Who 'll have the face, for instance, to affirm

He never heard, e'en while we crowned the girl,

That Juliers' tenure was by Salic law ;

That one, confessed her father's cousin's child,

And, she away, indisputable heir,

Against our choice protesting and the Duke's,

Claimed Juliers?—nor, as he preferred his claim,

'That first this, then another potentate,
Inclined to its allowance?—I or you,
Or any one except the lady's self?
Oh, it had been the direst cruelty
To break the business to her ! Things might change :
At all events, we 'd see next masque at end,
Next mummerly over first : and so the edge
Was taken off sharp tidings as they came,
Till here 's the Prince upon us, and there 's she
—Wreathing her hair, a song between her lips,
With just the faintest notion possible
That some such claimant earns a livelihood
About the world, by feigning grievances—
Few pay the story of, but grudge its price,
And fewer listen to, a second time.
Your method proves a failure ; now try mine !
And, since this must be carried . . .

Gui. [snatching the paper from him.] By your leave !
Your zeal transports you ! 'T will not serve the
Prince

So much as you expect, this course you 'd take.
If she leaves quietly her palace,—well ;
But if she died upon its threshold,—no :
He 'd have the trouble of removing her.
Come, gentles, we 're all—what the devil knows !
You, Gaucelme, won't lose character, beside—
You broke your father's heart superiorly
To gather his succession—never blush !
You 're from my province, and, be comforted,

They tell of it with wonder to this day.
 You can afford to let your talent sleep.
 We 'll take the very worst supposed, as true :
 There, the old Duke knew, when he hid his child
 Among the river-flowers at Ravestein,
 With whom the right lay ! Call the Prince our Duke !
 There, she 's no Duchess, she 's no anything
 More than a young maid with the bluest eyes :
 And now, sirs, we 'll not break this young maid's heart
 Coolly as Gaucelme could and would ! No haste !
 His talent 's full-blown, ours but in the bud :
 We 'll not advance to his perfection yet—
 Will we, Sir Maufroy ? See, I 've ruined Maufroy
 For ever as a courtier !

Gau. Here 's a coil !

And, count us, will you ? Count its residue,
 This boasted convoy, this day last year's crowd !
 A birthday, too, a gratulation-day !
 I 'm dumb : bid that keep silence !

Mau. and others.

Eh, Sir Guibert ?

He 's right : that does say something : that 's bare
 truth.

Ten—twelve, I make : a perilous dropping off !

Gui. Pooh—is it audience hour ? The vestibule
 Swarms too, I wager, with the common sort
 That want our privilege of entry here.

Gau. Adolf ! [*Re-enter ADOLF.*] Who's outside ?

Gui. Oh, your looks suffice !

Nobody waiting ?

Mau. [*looking through the door-folds.*] Scarce our number !

Gui. 'Sdeath !

Nothing to beg for, to complain about ?
It can't be ! Ill news spreads, but not so fast
As thus to frighten all the world !

Gau. The world
Lives out of doors, sir—not with you and me
By presence-chamber porches, state-room stairs,
Wherever warmth 's perpetual : outside 's free
To every wind from every compass-point
And who may get nipped needs be weather-wise.
The Prince comes and the lady's People go ;
The snow-geese settles down, the swallows flee—
Why should they wait for winter-time ? 'T is instinct :
Don 't you feel somewhat chilly ?

Gui. That 's their craft ?
And last year's crowders-round and criers-forth
That strewed the garlands, overarched the roads,
Lighted the bonfires, sang the loyal songs !
Well 't is my comfort, you could never call me
The People's Friend ! The People keep their word—
I keep my place : don 't doubt I 'll entertain
The People when the Prince comes, and the People
Are talked of ! Then, their speeches—no one tongue
Found respite, not a pen had holiday
—For they wrote, too, as well as spoke, these knaves !
Now see : we tax and tithe them, pill and poll,
They wince and fret enough, but pay they must
—We manage that,—so, pay with a good grace

They might as well, it costs so little more.
 But when we 've done with taxes, meet folk next
 Outside the toll-booth and the rating-place,
 In public—there they have us if they will,
 We 're at their mercy after that, you see !
 For one tax not ten 'devils could extort—
 Over and above necessity, a grace ;
 This prompt disbosoming of love, to wit—
 Their vine-leaf wrappage of our tribute-penny,
 And crowding attestation, all works well.
 Yet this precisely do they thrust on us !
 These cappings quick, these crook-and-cringings low,
 Hand to the heart, and forehead to the knee,
 With grin that shuts the eyes and opes the mouth—
 So tender they their love ; and, tender made,
 Go home to curse us, the first doit we ask.
 As if their souls were any longer theirs !
 As if they had not given ample warrant
 To who should clap a collar on their neck,
 Rings in their nose, a goad to either flank,
 And take them for the brute they boast themselves !
 Stay—there 's a bustle at the outer door—
 And somebody entreating . . . that 's my name !
 Adolf,—I heard my name !

Adolf.

'T was probably

The suitor.

Gui. Oh, there is one ?

Adolf.

With a suit

He 'd fain enforce in person.

Gui.

The good heart

—And the great fool ! Just ope the mid-door's fold !
Is that a lappet of his cloak, I see ?

Adolf. If it bear plenteous sign of travel . . . ay,
The very cloak my comrades tore !

Gui. Why tore ?

Adolf. He seeks the Duchess' presence in that trim :
Since daybreak, was he posted hereabouts
Lest he should miss the moment.

Gui. Where 's he now ?

Adolf. Gone for a minute possibly, not more :
They have ado enough to thrust him back.

Gui. Ay—but my name, I caught ?

Adolf. Oh, sir—he said

—What was it ?—You had known him formerly,
And, he believed, would help him did you guess
He waited now ; you promised him as much :
The old plea ! 'Faith, he 's back,—renews the charge !
[*Speaking at the door.*] So long as the man parleys, peace
outside—

Nor be too ready with your halberts, there !

Gau. My horse bespattered, as he blocked the path,
A thin sour man, not unlike somebody.

Adolf. He holds a paper in his breast, whereon
He glances when his cheeks flush and his brow
At each repulse—

Gau. I noticed he 'd a brow.

Adolf. So glancing, he grows calmer, leans awhile
Over the balustrade, adjusts his dress,
And presently turns round, quiet again,

With some new pretext for admittance.—Back !

(To GUIBERT.)—Sir, he has seen you ! Now cross
halberts ! Ha—

Pascal is prostrate—there lies Fabian too !

No passage ! Whither would the madman press ?

Close the doors quick on me !

Gui.

Too late ! He 's here.

Enter, hastily and with discomposed dress, VALENCE.

Val. Sir Guibert, will you help me ?—Me, that come
Charged by your townsmen, all who starve at Cleves,
To represent their heights and depths of woe
Before our Duchess and obtain relief !
Such errands barricade such doors, it seems :
But not a common hindrance drives me back
On all the sad yet hopeful faces, lit
With hope for the first time, which sent me forth.
Cleves, speak for me ! Cleves' men and women, speak !
Who followed me—your strongest—many a mile
That I might go the fresher from their ranks,
—Who sit—your weakest—by the city gates,
To take me fuller of what news I bring
As I return—for I must needs return !
—Can I ? 'T were hard, no listener for their wrongs,
To turn them back upon the old despair—
Harder, Sir Guibert, than imploring thus—
So, I do—any way you please—implore !
If you . . . but how should you remember Cleves ?
Yet they of Cleves remember you so well !
—Ay, comment on each trait of you they keep,

Your words and deeds caught up at second hand,—
 Proud, I believe, at bottom of their hearts,
 O' the very levity and recklessness
 Which only prove that you forget their wrongs.
 Cleves, the grand town, whose men and women starve,
 Is Cleves forgotten?—Then, remember me !

Y u promised me that you would help me once
 For other purpose : will you keep your word ?

Gui. And who may you be, friend ?

Val.

Valence of Cleves.

Gui. Valence of . . . not the advocate of Cleves,
 I owed my whole estate to, three years back ?
 Ay, well may you keep silence ! Why, my lords,
 You 've heard, I 'm sure, how, Pentecost three years,
 I was so nearly ousted of my land
 By some knaves'-pretext,—(eh ? when you refused me
 Your ugly daughter, Clugnet !)—and you 've heard
 How I recovered it by miracle
 —(When I refused her !) Here 's the very friend,
 —Valence of Cleves, all parties have to thank !
 Nay, Valence, this procedure 's vile in you !
 I 'm no more grateful than a courtier should,
 But politic am I—I bear a brain,
 Can cast about a little, might require
 Your services a second time. I tried
 To tempt you with advancement here to court
 —“ No ! ”—well, for curiosity at least
 To view our life here—“ No ! ”—our Duchess, then,—
 A pretty woman 's worth some pains to see,

Nor is she spoiled, I take it, if a crown
Complete the forehead pale and tresses pure . . .

Val. Our city trusted me its miseries,
And I am come.

Gui. So much for taste ! But "come,"
So may you be, for anything I know,
To beg the Pope's cross, or Sir Clugnet's daughter,
And with an equal chance you get all three !
If it was ever worth your while to come,
Was not the proper way worth finding too ?

Val. Straight to the palace-portal, sir, I came—

Gui. —And said ?—

Val. —That I had brought the miseries
Of a whole city to relieve.

Gui. —Which saying
Won your admittance ? You saw me, indeed,
And here, no doubt, you stand : as certainly,
My intervention, I shall not dispute,
Procures you audience ; which, if I procure,—
That paper's closely written—by Saint Paul,
Here flock the Wrongs, follow the Remedies,
Chapter and verse, One, Two, A, B and C !
Perhaps you 'd enter, make a reverence,
And launch these "miseries" from first to last ?

Val. How should they let me pause or turn aside ?

Gau. [*to VALENCE.*] My worthy sir, one question !

You 've come straight
From Cleves, you tell us : heard you any talk
At Cleves about our lady ?

Val. Much.

Gau. And what?

Val. Her wish was to redress all wrongs she knew.

Gau. That, you believed?

Val. You see me, sir!

Gau. —Nor stopped

Upon the road from Cleves to Juliers here,

For any—rumours you might find afloat?

Val. I had my townsmen's wrongs to busy me.

Gau. This is the lady's birthday, do you know?

—Her day of pleasure?

Val. —That the great, I know,

For pleasure born, should still be on the watch

To exclude pleasure when a duty offers:

Even as, for duty born, the lowly too

May ever snatch a pleasure if in reach:

Both will have plenty of their birthright, sir!

Gau. [*Aside to GUIBERT.*] Sir Guibert, here's your man! No scruples now—

You'll never find his like! Time presses hard.

I've seen your drift and Adolf's too, this while,

But you can't keep the hour of audience back

Much longer, and at noon the Prince arrives.

[*Pointing to VALENCE.*] Entrust him with it—fool no chance away!

Gui.—Him?

Gau. —With the missive! What's the man to her?

Gui. No bad thought!—Yet, 't is yours, who ever played The tempting serpent: else 't were no bad thought!

I should—and do—mistrust it for your sake,
Or else . . .

Enter an Official who communicates with ADOLF.

Adolf. The Duchess will receive the court !

Gui. Give us a moment, Adolf ! Valence, friend,
I 'll help you ! We of the service, you 're to mark,
Have special entry, while the herd . . . the folks
Outside, get access through our help alone ;
—Well, it is so, was so, and I suppose
So ever will be : your natural lot is, therefore,
To wait your turn and opportunity,
And probably miss both. Now, I engage
To set you, here and in a minute's space,
Before the lady, with full leave to plead
Chapter and verse, and A, and B, and C,
To heart's content.

Val. I grieve that I must ask,—
This being, yourself admit, the custom here,—
To what the price of such a favour mounts ?

Gui. Just so ! You 're not without a courtier's tact.
Little at court, as your quick instinct prompts,
Do such as we without a recompense.

Val. Yours is ?—

Gui. A trifle : here 's a document
'T is some one's duty to present her Grace—
I say, not mine—these say, not theirs—such points
Have weight at court. Will you relieve us all
And take it ? Just say, "I am bidden lay
" This paper at the Duchess' feet ! "

Val.

No more ?

I thank you, sir !

Adolf. Her Grace receives the court !

Gui. [*Aside.*] Now, *sursum corda*, quoth the mass-priest ! Do—

Whoever 's my kind saint, do let alone
These pushings to and fro, and pullings back ;
Peaceably let me hang o' the devil's arm
The downward path, if you can 't pluck me off
Completely ! Let me live quite his, or yours !

[*The Courtiers begin to range themselves, and move toward the door.*]

After me, Valence ! So, our famous Cleves
Lacks bread ? Yet don 't we gallants buy their lace ?
And dear enough—it beggars me, I know,
To keep my very gloves fringed properly.
This, Valence, is our Great State Hall you cross ;
Yon grey urn's veritable marcasite,
The Pope's gift : and those salvers testify
The Emperor. Presently you 'll set your foot
. . . But you don 't speak, friend Valence !

Val.

I shall speak.

Gau. [*Aside to GUIBERT.*] Guibert—it were no such ungraceful thing

If you and I, at first, seemed horror-struck
With the bad news. Look here, what you shall do !
Suppose you, first, clap hand to sword and cry
“Yield strangers our allegiance ? First I 'll perish
“Beside your Grace !”—and so give me the cue
To . . .

Gui. —Clap your hand to note-book and jot down
That to regale the Prince with? I conceive.
[To VALENCE.] Do, Valence, speak, or I shall half suspect
You're plotting to supplant us, me the first,
I' the lady's favour! Is 't the grand harangue
You mean to make, that thus engrosses you?
—Which of her virtues you'll apostrophize?
Or is 't the fashion you aspire to start,
Of that close-curved, not unbecoming hair?
Or what else ponder you?

Val.

My townsmen's wrongs.

ACT II.

Noon.—SCENE. *The Presence-chamber.*

The DUCHESS and SABYNE.

The D. Announce that I am ready for the court!

Sab. 'T is scarcely audience-hour, I think; your
Grace

May best consult your own relief, no doubt,
And shun the crowd: but few can have arrived.

The D. Let those not yet arrived, then, keep away!
'T was me, this day last year at Ravestein,
You hurried. It has been full time, beside,
This half-hour. Do you hesitate?

Sab.

Forgive me!

The D. Stay, Sabyne; let me hasten to make sure

Of one true thanker : here with you begins
 My audience, claim you first its privilege !
 It is my birth's event they celebrate :
 You need not wish me more such happy days,
 But—ask some favour ! Have you none to ask ?
 Has Adolf none, then ? this was far from least
 Of much I waited for impatiently,
 Assure yourself ! It seemed so natural
 Your gift, beside this bunch of river-bells,
 Should be the power and leave of doing good
 To you, and greater pleasure to myself.
 You ask my leave to-day to marry Adolf ?
 The rest is my concern.

Sab. Your Grace is ever

Our lady of dear Ravestein,—but, for Adolf . . .

The D. “ But ” ? You have not, sure, changed in your
 regard

And purpose towards him ?

Sab. We change ?

The D. Well then ? Well ?

Sab. How could we two be happy, and, most like,
 Leave Juliers, when—when . . . but 't is audience-time !

The D. “ When, if you left me, I were left indeed ! ”
 Would you subjoin that ?—Bid the court approach !
 —Why should we play thus with each other, Sabyne ?
 Do I not know, if courtiers prove remiss,
 If friends detain me, and get blame for it,
 There is a cause ? Of last year's fervid throng
 Scarce one half comes no v.

Sab. [*Aside.*] One half? No, alas!

The D. So can't the mere suspicion of a cloud
Over my fortunes, strike each loyal heart.
They 've heard of this Prince Berthold; and, forsooth,
Some foolish arrogant pretence he makes,
May grow more foolish and more arrogant,
They please to apprehend! I thank their love.
Admit them!

Sab. [*Aside.*] How much has she really learned?

The D. Surely, whoever's absent, Tristan waits?
—Or at least Romuald, whom my father raised
From nothing—come, he's faithful to me, come!
(Sabyne, I should but be the prouder—yes,
The fitter to comport myself aright)
Not Romuald? Xavier—what said he to that?
For Xavier hates a parasite, I know!

[SABYNE goes out.]

The D. Well, sunshine's everywhere, and summer too.
Next year 't is the old place again, perhaps—
The water-breeze again, the birds again.
—It cannot be! It is too late to be!
What part had I, or choice in all of it?
Hither they brought me; I had not to think
Nor care, concern myself with doing good
Or ill, my task was just—to live,—to live,
And, answering ends there was no need explain,
To render Juliers happy—so they said.
All could not have been falsehood: some was love,
And wonder and obedience. I did all

They looked for : why then cease to do it now ?
 Yet this is to be calmly set aside,
 And—ere next birthday's dawn, for aught I know,
 Things change, a claimant may arrive, and I . . .
 It cannot nor it shall not be ! His right ?
 Well then, he has the right, and I have not,
 —But who bade all of you surround my life
 And close its growth up with your ducal crown.
 Which, plucked off rudely, leaves me perishing ?
 I could have been like one of you,—loved, hoped,
 Feared, lived and died like one of you—but you
 Would take that life away and give me this,
 And I will keep this ! I will face you ! Come !

Enter the Courtiers and VALENCE.

The Courtiers. Many such happy mornings to your
 Grace !

The D. [*Aside, as they pay their devoir.*] The same
 words, the same faces,—the same love !

I have been overfearful. These are few ;
 But these, at least, stand firmly : these are mine.
 As many come as may ; and if no more,
 'T is that these few suffice—they do suffice !
 What succour may not next year bring me ? Plainly,
 I feared too soon. [*To the Court.*] I thank you, sirs :
 all thanks !

Val. [*Aside, as the DUCHESS passes from one group to
 another, conversing.*]

'T is she—the vision this day last year brought,
 When, for a golden moment at our Cleves,

She tarried in her progress hither. Cleves
 Chose me to speak its welcome, and I spoke
 —Not that she could have noted the recluse
 —Ungainly, old before his time—who gazed.
 Well, Heaven's gifts are not wasted, and that gaze
 Kept, and shall keep me to the end, her own !
 She was above it—but so would not sink
 My gaze to earth ! The People caught it, hers—
 Thenceforward, mine ; but thus entirely mine,
 Who shall affirm, had she not raised my soul
 Ere she retired and left me—them ? She turns—
 There 's all her wondrous face at once ! The ground
 Reels and . . . [*suddenly occupying himself with his paper.*]

These wrongs of theirs I have to plead !

The D. [*to the Court.*] Nay, compliment enough ! and
 kindness' self

Should pause before it wish me more such years.
 'T was fortunate that thus, ere youth escaped,
 I tasted life's pure pleasure—one such, pure,
 Is worth a thousand, mixed—and youth 's for pleasure :
 Mine is received ; let my age pay for it.

Gau. So pay, and pleasure paid for, thinks your Grace,
 Should never go together ?

Gai. How, Sir Gaucelme ?

Hurry one's feast down unenjoyingly
 At the snatched breathing-intervals of work ?
 As good you saved it till the dull day's-end
 When, stiff and sleepy, appetite is gone.
 Eat first, then work upon the strength of food !

The D. True : you enable me to risk my future,
 By giving me a past beyond recall.
 I lived, a girl, one happy leisure year :
 Let me endeavour to be the Duchess now !
 And so,—what news, Sir Guibert, spoke you of ?

[*As they advance a little, and GUIBERT speaks—*

—That gentleman ?

Val. [*Aside.*] I feel her eyes on me.

Gui. [*to VALENCE.*] The Duchess, sir, inclines to hear
 your suit.

Advance ! He is from Cleves.

Val. [*coming forward.*] [*Aside.*] Their wrongs—their
 wrongs !

The D. And you, sir, are from Cleves ? How fresh in
 mind,

The hour or two I passed at queenly Cleves !
 She entertained me bravely, but the best
 Of her good pageant seemed its standers-by
 With insuppressive joy on every face !
 What says my ancient famous happy Cleves ?

Val. Take the truth, lady—you are made for truth !
 So think my friends : nor do they less deserve
 The having you to take it, you shall think,
 When you know all—nay, when you only know
 How, on that day you recollect at Cleves,
 When the poor acquiescing multitude
 Who thrust themselves with all their woes apart
 Into unnoticed corners, that the few,
 Their means sufficed to muster trappings for,

Might fill the foreground, occupy your sight
 With joyous faces fit to bear away
 And boast of as a sample of all Cleves
 —How, when to daylight these crept out once more,
 Clutching, unconscious, each his empty rags
 Whence the scant coin, which had not half bought bread,
 That morn he shook forth, counted piece by piece,
 And, well-advisedly, on perfumes spent them
 To burn, or flowers to strew, before your path
 —How, when the golden flood of music and bliss
 Ebbed, as their moon retreated, and again
 Left the sharp black-point rocks of misery bare
 —Then I, their friend had only to suggest
 “Saw she the horror as she saw the pomp!”
 And as one man they cried “He speaks the truth:
 “Show her the horror! Take from our own mouths
 “Our wrongs and show them, she will see them too!”
 This they cried, lady! I have brought the wrongs.

The D. Wrongs? Cleves has wrongs—apparent now
 and thus?

I thank you! In that paper? Give it me!

Val. (There, Cleves!) In this! (What did I promise,
 Cleves?)

Our weavers, clothiers, spinners are reduced
 Since . . . Oh, I crave your pardon! I forget
 I buy the privilege of this approach,
 And promptly would discharge my debt. I lay
 This paper humbly at the Duchess' feet.

[Presenting GUIBERT'S paper.]

Gui. Stay ! for the present . . .

The D.

Stay, sir ? I take aught

That teaches me their wrongs with greater pride

Than this your ducal circlet. Thank you, sir !

[*The DUCHESS reads hastily ; then, turning to the Courtiers—*

What have I done to you ? Your deed or mine

Was it, this crowning me ? I gave myself

No more a title to your homage, no,

Than church-flowers, born this season, wrote the words

In the saint's-book that sanctified them first.

For such a flower, you plucked me ; well, you erred—

Well, 't was a weed ; remove the eye-sore quick !

But should you not remember it has lain

Steeped in the candles' glory, palely shrined,

Nearer God's Mother than most earthly things ?

—That if 't be faded 't is with prayer's sole breath—

That the one day it boasted was God's day ?

Still, I do thank you ! Had you used respect,

Here might I dwindle to my last white leaf,

Here lose life's latest freshness, which even yet

May yield some wandering insect rest and food :

So, fling me forth, and—all is best for all !

[*After a pause.*] Prince Berthold, who art Juliers' Duke,
it seems—

The King's choice, and the Emperor's, and the Pope's—

Be mine, too ! Take this People ! Tell not me

Of rescripts, precedents, authorities,

—But take them, from a heart that yearns to give !

Find out their love,—I could not ; find their fear,—

I would not ; find their like,—I never shall,
Among the flowers ! [*Taking off her coronet.*

Colombe of Ravestein

Thanks God she is no longer Duchess here !

Val. [*advancing to GUIBERT.*] Sir Guibert, knight, they
call you—this of mine

Is the first step I ever set at court.

You dared make me your instrument, I find ;

For that, so sure as you and I are men,

We reckon to the utmost presently :

But as you are a courtier and I none,

Your knowledge may instruct me. I, already,

Have too far outraged, by my ignorance

Of courtier-ways, this lady, to proceed

A second step and risk addressing her :

—I am degraded—you, let me address !

Out of her presence, all is plain enough

What I shall do—but in her presence, too,

Surely there 's something proper to be done.

[*To the others.*] You, gentles, tell me if I guess aright—

May I not strike this man to earth ?

The Courtiers. [*as GUIBERT springs forward, with-
holding him.*] Let go !

—The clothiers' spokesman, Guibert ? Grace a churl ?

The D. [*to VALENCE.*] Oh, be acquainted with your
party, sir !

He 's of the oldest lineage Juliers boasts ;

A lion crests him for a cognisance

" Scorning to waver "—that 's his 'scutcheon's word ;

His office with the new Duke—probably
The same in honour as with me ; or more,
By so much as this gallant turn deserves.
He 's now, I dare say, of a thousand times
The rank and influence that remain with her
Whose part you take ! So, lest for taking it
You suffer . . .

Val. I may strike him then to earth ?

Gui. [*falling on his knee.*] Great and dear lady, pardon
me ! Hear once !

Believe me and be merciful—be just !
I could not bring myself to give that paper
Without a keener pang than I dared meet
—And so felt Clugnet here, and Maufroy here
—No one dared meet it. Protestation 's cheap,—
But, if to die for you did any good,
[*To GAUCELME.*] Would not I die, sir ? Say your worst
of me !

But it does no good, that 's the mournful truth.
And since the hint of a resistance, even,
Would just precipitate, on you the first,
A speedier ruin—I shall not deny,
Saving myself indubitable pain,
I thought to give you pleasure (who might say ?)
By showing that your only subject found
To carry the sad notice, was the man
Precisely ignorant of its contents ;
A nameless, mere provincial advocate ;
One whom 't was like you never saw before,

Never would see again. All has gone wrong ;
But I meant right, God knows, and you, I trust !

The D. A nameless advocate, this gentleman ?—
—(I pardon you, Sir Guibert !)

Gui. [*rising, to VALENCE.*]—Sir, and you ?—

Val. —Rejoice that you are lightened of a load.
Now, you have only me to reckon with.

The D. One I have never seen, much less obliged ?—

Val. Dare I speak, lady ?

The D. Dare you ! Heard you not
I rule no longer ?

Val. Lady, if your rule
Were based alone on such a ground as these

[*Pointing to the Courtiers.*

Could furnish you,—abjure it ! They have hidden
A source of true dominion from your sight.

The D. You hear them—no such source is left . . .

Val. Hear Cleves !

Whose haggard craftsmen rose to starve this day,
Starve now, and will lie down at night to starve,
Sure of a like to-morrow—but as sure
Of a most unlike morrow-after-that,
Since end things must, end howsoe'er things may.
What curbs the brute-force instinct in its hour ?
What makes—instead of rising, all as one,
And teaching fingers, so expert to wield
Their tool, the broadsword's play or carbine's trick,
—What makes that there 's an easier help, they think,
For you, whose name so few of them can spell,

Whose face scarce one in every hundred saw,—
You simply have to understand their wrongs,
And wrongs will vanish—so, still trades are plied,
And swords lie rusting, and myself stand here ?
There is a vision in the heart of each
Of justice, mercy, wisdom, tenderness
To wrong and pain, and knowledge of its cure :
And these embodied in a woman's form
That best transmits them, pure as first received,
From God above her, to mankind below.
Will you derive your rule from such a ground,
Or rather hold it by the suffrage, say,
Of this man—this—and this ?

The D. [after a pause.] You come from Cleves.
How many are at Cleves of such a mind ?

Val. [from his paper.] “ We, all the manufacturers of
Cleves—”

The D. Or stay, sir—lest I seem too covetous—
Are you my subject ? such as you describe,
Am I to you, though to no other man ?

Val. [from his paper.]—“ Valence ordained your
Advocate at Cleves ”—

The D. [replacing the coronet.] Then I remain Cleves'
Duchess ! Take you note,
While Cleves but yields one subject of this stamp,
I stand her lady till she waves me off !
For her sake, all the Prince claims I withhold ;
Laugh at each menace ; and, his power defying,
Return his missive with its due contempt !

[Casting it away.]

Gui. [*picking it up.*—Which to the Prince I will deliver, lady,

[*Note it down, Gaucelme*—with your message too !

The D. I think the office is a subject's, sir !

—Either . . . how style you him ?—my special guarder

The Marshal's—for who knows but violence

May follow the delivery ?—Or, perhaps,

My Chancellor's—for law may be to urge

On its receipt !—Or, even my Chamberlain's—

For I may violate established form !

[*To VALENCE.*] Sir,—for the half-hour till this service ends,

Will you become all these to me ?

Val. [*falling on his knee.*] My liege !

The D. Give me !

[*The Courtiers present their badges of office.*

[*Putting them by.*—Whatever was their virtue once,

They need new consecration. [*Raising VALENCE.*] Are you mine ?

—I will be Duchess yet !

[*She retires.*

The Courtiers.

Our Duchess yet !

A glorious lady ! Worthy love and dread !

I'll stand by her,—and I, whate'er betide !

Gui. [*to VALENCE.*] Well done, well done, sir ! I care not who knows,

You have done nobly and I envy you—

Tho' I am but unfairly used, I think :

For when one gets a place like this I hold,

One gets too the remark that its mere wages,
 The pay and the preferment, make our prize.
 Talk about zeal and faith apart from these,
 We 're laughed at—much would zeal and faith subsist
 Without these also ! Yet, let these be stopped,
 Our wages discontinue,—then, indeed,
 Our zeal and faith, (we hear on every side,)
 Are not released—having been pledged away
 I wonder, for what zeal and faith in turn ?
 Hard money purchased me my place ! No, no—
 I 'm right, sir—but your wrong is better still,
 If I had time and skill to argue it.
 Therefore, I say, I 'll serve you, how you please—
 If you like,—fight you, as you seem to wish—
 (The kinder of me that, in sober truth,
 I never dreamed I did you any harm) . . .

Gau. —Or, kinder still, you 'll introduce, no doubt,
 His merits to the Prince who 's just at hand,
 And let no hint drop he 's made Chancellor
 And Chamberlain and Heaven knows what beside !

Clug. [*to VALENCE.*] You stare, young sir, and threaten !

Let me say,

That at your age, when first I came to court,
 I was not much above a gentleman ;
 While now . . .

Val. —You are Head-Lackey ? With your office
 I have not yet been graced, sir !

Other Courtiers to Clug.

Let him talk !

Fidelity, disinterestedness,

Excuse so much ! Men claim my worship ever
Who staunchly and steadfastly . . .

Enter ADOLF.

Adolf. The Prince arrives.

Courtiers. Ha ? How ?

Adolf. He leaves his guard a stage behind
At Aix, and enters almost by himself.

1st Court. The Prince ! This foolish business puts all
out.

2nd Court. Let Gaucelme speak first !

3rd Court. Better I began
About the state of Juliers : should one say
All 's prosperous and inviting him ?

4th Court. —Or rather,
All 's prostrate and imploring him ?

5th Court. That 's best.
Where 's the Cleves' paper, by the way ?

4th Court. [*to VALENCE.*] Sir—sir—
If you 'll but lend that paper—trust it me,
I 'll warrant . . .

5th Court. Softly, sir—the Marshal's duty !

Clug. Has not the Chamberlain a hearing first
By virtue of his patent ?

Gau. Patents ?—Duties ?
All that, my masters, must begin again !
One word composes the whole controversy :
We 're simply now—the Prince's !

The Others. Ay—the Prince's !

Enter Sabyne.

Sab. Adolf! Bid . . . Oh, no time for ceremony!
Where 's whom our lady calls her only subject?
She needs him. Who is here the Duchess's?

Val. [*starting from his reverie.*] Most gratefully I follow
to her feet.

ACT III.

Afternoon. SCENE.—The Vestibule.

Enter PRINCE BERTHOLD and MELCHIOR.

Berth. A thriving little burgh this Juliers looks.
[*Half-apart.*] Keep Juliers, and as good you kept
Cologne:
Better try Aix, though!—

Mel. Please 't your Highness speak?

Berth. [*as before.*] Aix, Cologne, Frankfort,—Milan;
—Rome!—

Mel. —The Grave.

—More weary seems your Highness, I remark,
Than sundry conquerors whose path I 've watched
Through fire and blood to any prize they gain.
I could well wish you, for your proper sake,
Had met some shade of opposition here
—Found a blunt seneschal refuse unlock,
Or a scared usher lead your steps astray.
You must not look for next achievement's palm
So easily: this will hurt your conquering.

Berth. My next? Ay—as you say, my next and next!
Well, I am tired, that's truth, and moody too,
This quiet entrance-morning: listen why!
Our little burgh, now, Juliers—'t is indeed
One link, however insignificant,
Of the great chain by which I reach my hope,
—A link I must secure; but otherwise,
You'd wonder I esteem it worth my grasp.
Just see what life is, with its shifts and turns!
It happens now—this very nook—to be
A place that once . . . not a long while since, neither—
When I lived an ambiguous hanger-on
Of foreign courts, and bore my claims about,
Discarded by one kinsman, and the other
A poor priest merely,—then, I say, this place
Shone my ambition's object; to be Duke—
Seemed then, what to be Emperor seems now.
My rights were far from being judged as plain
In those days as of late, I promise you:
And 't was my day-dream, Lady Colombe here
Might e'en compound the matter, pity me,
Be struck, say, with my chivalry and grace
(I was a boy!)—bestow her hand at length,
And make me Duke, in her right if not mine.
Here am I, Duke confessed, at Juliers now.
Hearken: if ever I be Emperor,
Remind me what I felt and said to-day!

Mel. All this consoles a bookish man like me,
—And so will weariness cling to you. Wrong,

Wrong ! Had you sought the lady's court yourself,—
 Faced the redoubtables composing it,
 Flattered this, threatened that man, bribed the other,—
 Pleading by writ and word and deed, your cause,—
 Conquered a footing inch by painful inch,—
 And, after long years' struggle, pounced at last
 On her for prize,—the right life had been lived,
 And justice done to divers faculties
 Shut in that brow. Yourself were visible
 As you stood victor, then ; whom now—(your pardon !)
 I am forced narrowly to search and see—
 So are you hid by helps—this Pope, your uncle—
 Your cousin, the other King ! You are a mind,—
 They, body : too much of mere legs-and-arms
 Obstructs the mind so ! Match these with their like :
 Match mind with mind !

Berth. And where 's your mind to match ?
 They show me legs-and-arms to cope withal !
 I 'd subjugate this city—where 's its mind ?

[*The Courtiers enter slowly.*]

Mel. Got out of sight when you came troops and all !
 And in its stead, here greets you flesh-and-blood—
 A smug œconomy of both, this first !

[*As CLUGNET bows obsequiously.*]

Well done, gout, all considered !—I may go ?

Berth. Help me receive them !

Mel. Oh, they just will say
 What yesterday at Aix their fellows said,—
 At Treves, the day before !—Sir Prince, my friend,

Why do you let your life slip thus?—Meantime.

I have my little Juliers to achieve—

The understanding this tough Platonist,

Your holy uncle disinterred, Amelius—

Lend me a company of horse and foot,

To help me through his tractate—gain my Duchy !

Berth. And Empire, after that is gained, will be—?

Mel. To help me through your uncle's comment,
Prince ! [*Goes.*

Berth. Ah? Well: he o'er-refines—the scholar's
fault !

How do I let my life slip? Say, this life,

I lead now, differs from the common life

Of other men in mere degree, not kind,

Of joys and griefs,—still there is such degree—

Mere largeness in a life is something, sure,—

Enough to care about and struggle for,

In this world: for this world, the size of things ;

The sort of things, for that to come, no doubt.

A great is better than a little aim :

And when I wooed Priscilla's rosy mouth

And failed so, under that grey convent-wall,

Was I more happy than I should be now

[By this time, the Courtiers are ranged before him.]

If failing of my Empire? Not a whit.

—Here comes the mind, it once had tasked me sore

To baffle, but for my advantages !

All's best as 't is : these scholars talk and talk.

[Seats himself]

The Courtiers. Welcome our Prince to Juliers!--to his heritage !

Our dutifullest service proffer we !

Clug. I, please your Highness, having exercised
The function of Grand Chamberlain at court,
With much acceptance, as men testify . . .

Berth. I cannot greatly thank you, gentlemen !
The Pope declares my claim to the Duchy founded
On strictest justice ; if you concede it, therefore,
I do not wonder : and the kings my friends
Protesting they will see such claim enforced,
You easily may offer to assist us.

But there 's a slight discretionary power
To serve me in the matter, you 've had long,
Though late you use it. This is well to say—
But could you not have said it months ago ?
I 'm not denied my own Duke's truncheon, true—
'T is flung me—I stoop down, and from the ground
Pick it, with all you placid standers-by—
And now I have it, gems and mire at once,
Grace go with it to my soiled hands, you say !

Gui. (By Paul, the advocate our doughty friend
Cuts the best figure !)

Gau. If our ignorance
May have offended, sure our loyalty . . .

Berth. Loyalty ? Yours ?—Oh—of yourselves you
speak !

—I mean the Duchess all this time, I hope !
And since I have been forced repeat my claims

As if they never had been made before,
 As I began, so must I end, it seems.
 The formal answer to the grave demand !
 What says the lady ?

Courtiers. [*one to another.*] *1st Court.* Marshal !

2nd Court. Orator !

Gui. A variation of our mistress' way !

Wipe off his boots' dust, Clugnet !—that, he waits !

1st Court. Your place !

2nd Court. Just now it was your own !

Gui.

The devil's !

Berth. [*to GUIBERT.*] Come forward, friend —you with
 the paper, there !

Is Juliers the first city I 've obtained ?

By this time, I may boast proficiency

In each decorum of the circumstance.

Give it me as she gave it—the petition !

Demand, you style it—What 's required, in brief ?

What title's reservation, appanage's

Allowance ?—I heard all at Treves, last week.

Gau. [*to GUIBERT.*] “Give it him as she gave it !”

Gui.

And why not ?

[*To BERTHOLD.*] The lady crushed your summons thus
 together,

And bade me, with the very greatest scorn

So fair a frame could hold, inform you . . .

Courtiers.

Stop—

Idiot !

Gui. —Inform you she denied your claim,

Defied yourself ! (I tread upon his heel,
The blustering advocate !)

Berth. By heaven and earth !

Dare you jest, sir ?

Gui. Did they at Treves, last week ?

Berth. [*starting up.*] Why then, I look much bolder
than I knew,

And you prove better actors than I thought--

Since, as I live, I took you as you entered

For just so many dearest friends of mine,

Fled from the sinking to the rising power

--The sneaking'st crew, in short, I e'er despised !

Whereas, I am alone here for the moment,

With every soldier left behind at Aix !

Silence ? That means the worst ? I thought as much !

What follows next then ?

Courtiers. Gracious Prince—he raves !

Gui. He asked the truth and why not get the truth ?

Berth. Am I a prisoner ? Speak, will somebody ?

—But why stand paltering with imbeciles ?

Let me see her, or . . .

Gui. Her, without her leave,

Shall no one see : she's Duchess yet !

Courtiers. [*Footsteps without, as they are disputing.*]

Good chance !

She's here—the Lady Colombe's self !

Berth. 'T is well !

[*Aside.*] Array a handful thus against my world ?

Not ill done truly ! Were not this a mind

To match one's mind with ? Colombe !—Let us wait !
I failed so, under that grey convent wall !

She comes.

Gui. The Duchess ! Strangers, range yourselves !

*[As the DUCHESS enters in conversation with VALENCE,
BERTHOLD and the Courtiers fall back a little.]*

The D. Presagefully it beats, presagefully,
My heart : the right is Berthold's and not mine.

Val. Grant that he has the right, dare I mistrust
Your power to acquiesce so patiently
As you believe, in such a dream-like change
Of fortune—change abrupt, profound, complete ?

The D. Ah, the first bitterness is over now !
Bitter I may have felt it to confront
The truth, and ascertain those natures' value
I had so counted on ; that was a pang :
But I did bear it, and the worst is over.
Let the Prince take them !

Val. —And take Juliers too ?
—Your people without crosses, wands and chains—
Only with hearts ?

The D. There I feel guilty, sir !
I cannot give up what I never had :
For I ruled these, not them—these stood between.
Shall I confess, sir ? I have heard by stealth
Of Berthold from the first ; more news and more :
Closer and closer swam the thunder cloud,
But I was safely housed with these, I knew.
At times when to the casement I would turn,

At a bird's passage or a flower-trail's play,
I caught the storm's red glimpses on its edge—
Yet I was sure some one of all these friends
Would interpose : I followed the bird's flight
Or plucked the flower—some one would interpose !

Val. Not one thought on the People—and Cleves
there !

The D. Now, sadly conscious my real sway was missed,
Its shadow goes without so much regret :
Else could I not again thus calmly bid you,
Answer Prince Berthold !

Val. Then you acquiesce ?

The D. Remember over whom it was I ruled !

Gui. [*stepping forward.*] Prince Berthold, yonder,
craves an audience, lady !

The D. [*to VALENCE.*] I only have to turn, and I shall
face

Prince Berthold ! Oh, my very heart is sick !
It is the daughter of a line of Dukes
This scornful insolent adventurer
Will bid depart from my dead father's halls !
I shall not answer him—dispute with him—
But, as he bids, depart ! Prevent it, sir !
Sir—but a mere day's respite ! Urge for me
—What I shall call to mind I should have urged
When time 's gone by—'t will all be mine, you urge !
A day—an hour—that I myself may lay
My rule down ! 'T is too sudden—must not be !
'The world 's to hear of it ! Once done—for ever !

How will it read, sir? How be sung about?
Prevent it!

Berth. [*approaching.*] Your frank indignation, lady,
Cannot escape me. Overbold I seem;
But somewhat should be pardoned my surprise
At this reception,—this defiance, rather.
And if, for their and your sake, I rejoice
Your virtues could inspire a trusty few
To make such gallant stand in your behalf,
I cannot but be sorry, for my own,
Your friends should force me to retrace my steps:
Since I no longer am permitted speak
After the pleasant peaceful course prescribed
No less by courtesy than relationship—
Which I remember, if you once forgot.
But never must attack pass unrepelled.
Suffer, that through you, I demand of these,
Who controverts my claim to Juliers?

The D.

—Me

You say, you do not speak to—

Berth.

Of your subjects

I ask, then: whom do you accredit? Where
Stand those should answer?

Val. [*advancing.*]

The lady is alone!

Berth. Alone, and thus? So weak and yet so bold?

Val. I said she was alone—

Berth.

—And weak, I said.

Val. When is man strong until he feels alone?

It was some lonely strength at first, be sure,

Created organs, such as those you seek,
By which to give its varied purpose shape—
And, naming the selected ministrants,
Took sword, and shield, and sceptre,—each, a man !
That strength performed its work and passed its way :
You see our lady : there, the old shapes stand !
—A Marshal, Chamberlain, and Chancellor—
“ Be helped their way, into their death put life
“ And find advantage ! ”—so you counsel us.
But let strength feel alone, seek help itself,—
And, as the inland-hatched sea-creature hunts
The sea's breast out,—as, littered 'mid the waves
The desert-brute makes for the desert's joy,
So turns our lady to her true resource,
Passing o'er hollow fictions, worn-out types,
—And I am first her instinct fastens on.
And prompt I say, as clear as heart can speak,
The People will not have you ; nor shall have !
It is not merely I shall go bring Cleves
And fight you to the last,—though that does much,
And men and children,—ay, and women too,
Fighting for home, are rather to be feared
Than mercenaries fighting for their pay—
But, say you beat us, since such things have been,
And, where this Juliers laughed, you set your foot
Upon a steaming bloody splash—what then ?
Stand you the more our lord that there you stand ?
Lord it o'er troops whose force you concentrate,
A pillared flame whereto all ardours tend—

Lord it 'mid priests whose schemes you amplify,
 A cloud of smoke 'neath which all shadows brood—
 But never, in this gentle spot of earth,
 Can you become our Colombe, our play-queen,
 For whom, to furnish lilies for her hair,
 We 'd pour our veins forth to enrich the soil !
 —Our conqueror? Yes!—Our despot? Yes!—Our
 Duke?

Know yourself, know us !

Berth. [*who has been in thought.*] Know your lady, also !
 [*Very deferentially.*]—To whom I needs must exculpate
 myself

For having made a rash demand, at least.
 Wherefore to you, sir, who appear to be
 Her chief adviser, I submit my claims, [*Giving papers.*
 But, this step taken, take no further step,
 Until the Duchess shall pronounce their worth.
 Here be our meeting-place ; at night, its time :
 Till when I humbly take the lady's leave !

[*He withdraws. As the DUCHESS turns to VALENCE, the
 Courtiers interchange glances and come forward a little.*

1st Court. So, this was their device !

2nd Court. No bad device !

3rd Court. You 'd say they love each other, Guibert's
 friend

From Cleves, and she, the Duchess !

4th Court. —And moreover,
 That all Prince Berthold comes for, is to help
 Their loves !

5th. *Court.* Pray, Guibert, what is next to do?

Gui. [*advancing.*] I laid my office at the Duchess' foot—

Others. And I—and I—and I!

The D. I took them, sirs.

Gui. [*Apart to VALENCE.*] And now, sir, I am simple knight again—

Guibert, of the great ancient house, as yet
That never bore affront; whate'er your birth,—
As things stand now, I recognize yourself
(If you'll accept experience of some date)
As like to be the leading man o' the time,
Therefore as much above me now, as I
Seemed above you this morning. Then, I offered
To fight you: will you be as generous
And now fight me?

Val. Ask when my life is mine!

Gui. ('T is hers now!)

Clug. [*Apart to VALENCE, as Guibert turns from him.*]

You, sir, have insulted me
Grossly,—will grant me, too, the selfsame favour
You've granted him, just now, I make no question?

Val. I promise you, as him, sir.

Clug. Do you so?

Handsomely said! I hold you to it, sir.
You'll get me reinstated in my office
As you will Guibert!

The D. I would be alone!

[*They begin to retire slowly; as VALENCE is about to follow—*
Alone, sir—only with my heart: you stay!

Gau. You hear that? Ah, light breaks upon me!
Cleves—

It was at Cleves some man harangued us all—
With great effect,—so those who listened said,
My thoughts being busy elsewhere : was this he ?
Guibert,—your strange, disinterested man !
Your uncorrupted, if uncourtly friend !
The modest worth you mean to patronize !
He cares about no Duchesses, not he—
His sole concern is with the wrongs of Cleves !
What, Guibert ? What, it breaks on you at last ?

Gui. Would this hall's floor were a mine's roof !—
I'd back

And in her very face . . .

Gau. Apply the match

That fired the train,—and where would you be, pray ?

Gui. With him !

Gau. Stand, rather, safe outside with me !

The mine 's charged—shall I furnish you the match
And place you properly ?—To the antechamber !

Gui. Can you ?

Gau. Try me !—Your friend 's in fortune !

Gui. Quick—

To the antechamber !—He is pale with bliss !

Gau. No wonder ! Mark her eyes !

Gui. To the antechamber !

[*The Courtiers retire.*]

The D. Sir, could you know all you have done for me
You were content ! You spoke, and I am saved !

Val. Be not too sanguine, lady ! Ere you dream,
That transient flush of generosity
Fades off, perchance ! The man, beside, is gone,—
Him we might bend ; but see, the papers here—
Inalterably his requirement stays,
And cold hard words have we to deal with now.
In that large eye there seemed a latent pride,
To self-denial not incompetent,
But very like to hold itself dispensed
From such a grace : however, let us hope !
He is a noble spirit in noble form.
I wish he less had bent that brow to smile
As with the fancy how he could subject
Himself upon occasion to—himself !
From rudeness, violence, you rest secure ;
But do not think your Duchy rescued yet !

The D. You,—who have opened a new world to me,
Will never take the faded language up
Of that I leave ? My Duchy—keeping it,
Or losing it—is that my sole world now ?

Val. Ill have I spoken if you thence despise
Juliers ; although the lowest, on true grounds,
Be worth more than the highest rule, on false :
Aspire to rule, on the true grounds !

The D. Nay, hear—
False, I will never—rash, I would not be !
This is indeed my birthday—soul and body,
Its hours have done on me the work of years.
You hold the requisition : ponder it !

If I have right, my duty 's plain : if he—
 Say so, nor ever change a tone of voice !
 At night you meet the Prince ; meet me at eve !
 Till when, farewell ! This discomposes you ?
 Believe in your own nature, and its force
 Of renovating mine ! I take my stand
 Only as under me the earth is firm :
 So, prove the first step stable, all will prove.
 That first, I choose—[*laying her hand on his,*—the next
 to take, choose you ! [*She withdraws.*

Val. [*after a pause.*] What drew down this on me ?
 —on me, dead once,

She thus bids live,—since all I hitherto
 Thought dead in me, youth's ardours and emprise,
 Burst into life before her, as she bids
 Who needs them. Whither will this reach, where end ?
 Her hand's print burns on mine . . . Yet she's above—
 So very far above me ! All 's too plain :
 I served her when the others sank away,
 And she rewards me as such souls reward—
 The changed voice, the suffusion of the cheek,
 The eye's acceptance, the expressive hand,
 —Reward, that 's little, in her generous thought,
 Though all to me . . .

I cannot so disclaim

Heaven's gift, nor call it other than it is !
 She loves me !

[*Looking at the Prince's papers.*—Which love, these
 perchance, forbid.

Can I decide against myself—pronounce
She is the Duchess and no mate for me?
—Cleves, help me! Teach me,—every haggard face,—
To sorrow and endure! I will do right
Whatever be the issue. Help me, Cleves!

ACT IV.

Evening. SCENE. An Antechamber.

Enter the Courtiers.

Mau. Now, then, that we may speak—how spring this
mine?

Gau. Is Guibert ready for its match? He cools!
Not so friend Valence with the Duchess there!
“Stay, Valence! Are not you my better self?”
And her cheek mantled—

Gui. Well, she loves him, sir:
And more,—since you will have it I grow cool,—
She's right: he's worth it.

Gau. For his deeds to-day?
Say so!

Gui. What should I say beside?

Gau. Not this—
For friendship's sake leave this for me to say—
That we're the dupes of an egregious cheat!
This plain unpractised suitor, who found way
To the Duchess through the merest die's turn-up

A year ago, had seen her and been seen,
Loved and been loved.

Gui.

Impossible !

Gau.

—Nor say,

How sly and exquisite a trick, moreover,
Was this which—taking not their stand on facts
Boldly, for that had been endurable,
But worming on their way by craft, they choose
Resort to, rather,—and which you and we,
Sheep-like, assist them in the playing off !
The Duchess thus parades him as preferred,
Not on the honest ground of preference,
Seeing first, liking more, and there an end—
But as we all had started equally,
And at the close of a fair race he proved
The only valiant, sage and loyal man.
Herself, too, with the pretty fits and starts,—
The careless, winning, candid ignorance
Of what the Prince might challenge or forego—
She had a hero in reserve ! What risk
Ran she ? This deferential easy Prince
Who brings his claims for her to ratify
—He 's just her puppet for the nonce ! You 'll see,—
Valence pronounces, as is equitable,
Against him : off goes the confederate :
As equitably, Valence takes her hand !

The Chancellor. You run too fast : her hand, no
subject takes.

Do not our archives hold her father's will ?

That will provides against such accident,
And gives next heir, Prince Berthold, the reversion
Of Juliers, which she forfeits, wedding so.

Gau. I know that, well as you,—but does the Prince ?
Knows Berthold, think you, that this plan, he helps,
For Valence's ennoblement,—would end,
If crowned with the success which seems its due,
In making him the very thing he plays,
The actual Duke of Juliers? All agree
That Colombe's title waived or set aside,
He is next heir.

The Chan. Incontrovertibly.

Gau. Guibert, your match, now, to the train !

Gui. Enough !

I 'm with you : selfishness is best again.
I thought of turning honest—what a dream !
Let 's wake now !

Gau. Selfish, friend, you never were :
'T was but a series of revenges taken
On your unselfishness for prospering ill.
But now that you 're grown wiser, what 's our course ?

Gui. —Wait, I suppose, till Valence weds our lady,
And then, if we must needs revenge ourselves,
Apprise the Prince.

Gau. —The Prince, ere then dismissed
With thanks for playing his mock part so well ?
Tell the Prince now, sir ! Ay, this very night—
Ere he accepts his dole and goes his way,
Explain how such a marriage makes him Duke,

'Then trust his gratitude for the surprise !

Gui. —Our lady wedding Valence all the same
As if the penalty were undisclosed ?

Good ! If she loves, she 'll not disown her love,
Throw Valence up. I wonder you see that.

Gau. The shame of it—the suddenness and shame
Within her, the inclining heart—without,
A terrible array of witnesses—
And Valence by, to keep her to her word,
With Berthold's indignation or disgust !
We 'll try it !—Not that we can venture much.
'Her confidence we 've lost for ever : Berthold's
Is all to gain.

Gui. To-night, then, venture we !
Yet—if lost confidence might be renewed ?

Gau. Never in noble natures ! With the base ones,—
Twist off the crab's claw, wait a smarting-while,
And something grows and grows and gets to be
A mimic of the lost joint, just so like
As keeps in mind it never, never will
Replace its predecessor ! Crabs do that :
But lop the lion's foot—and . . .

Gui. To the Prince !

Gau. [*Aside.*] And come what will to the lion's foot, I
pay you,

My cat's-paw, as I long have yearned to pay !

[*Aloud.*] Footsteps ! Himself ! 'Tis Valence breaks
on us,

Exulting that their scheme succeeds. We 'll hence—

And perfect ours ! Consult the archives, first—
Then, fortified with knowledge, seek the Hall !

Clug. [to GAUCELME as they retire.] You have not
smiled so since your father died !

As they retire, enter VALENCE with papers.

Val. So must it be ! I have examined these
With scarce a palpitating heart—so calm,
Keeping her image almost wholly off,
Setting upon myself determined watch,
Repelling to the uttermost his claims,
And the result is—all men would pronounce
And not I, only, the result to be—
Berthold is heir ; she has no shade of right
To the distinction which divided us,
But, suffered to rule first, I know not why,
Her rule connived at by those Kings and Popes,
To serve some devil's-purpose,—now 't is gained,
Whate'er it was, the rule expires as well.
—Valence, this rapture . . selfish can it be ?
Eject it from your heart, her home !—It stays !
Ah, the brave world that opens on us both !
—Do my poor townsmen so esteem it ? Cleves,—
I need not your pale faces ! This, reward
For service done to you ? Too horrible !
I never served you : 't was myself I served—
Nay, served not—rather saved from punishment
Which, had I failed you then, would plague me now !
My life continues yours, and your life, mine.
But if, to take God's gift, I swerve no step—

Cleves !—If I breathe no prayer for it—if she.

[Footsteps without.]

Colombe, that comes now, freely gives herself—
Will Cleves require, that, turning thus to her,
I . . .

Enter PRINCE BERTHOLD.

Pardon, sir ! I did not look for you
Till night, i' the Hall ; nor have as yet declared
My judgment to the lady.

Berth. So I hoped.

Val. And yet I scarcely know why that should check
The frank disclosure of it first to you—
What her right seems, and what, in consequence,
She will decide on—

Berth. That I need not ask.

Val. You need not : I have proved the lady's mind—
And, justice being to do, dare act for her.

Berth. Doubtless she has a very noble mind.

Val. Oh, never fear but she 'll in each conjuncture
Bear herself bravely ! She no whit depends
On circumstance ; as she adorns a throne,
She had adorned . .

Berth. A cottage—in what book
Have I read that, of every queen that lived ?
A throne ! You have not been instructed, sure,
To forestall my request ?

Val. 'T is granted, sir !
My heart instructs me. I have scrutinized
Your claims . . .

Berth. Ah—claims, you mean, at first preferred?

I come, before the hour appointed me,
To pray you let those claims at present rest,
In favour of a new and stronger one.

Val. You shall not need a stronger: on the part
O' the lady, all you offer I accept,
Since one clear right suffices: yours is clear.
Propose!

Berth. I offer her my hand.

Val. Your hand?

Berth. A Duke's, yourself say; and, at no far time,
Something here whispers me—the Emperor's.
The lady's mind is noble; which induced
This seizure of occasion ere my claims
Were—settled, let us amicably say!

Val. Your hand!

Berth. (He will fall down and kiss it next!)
Sir, this astonishment's too flattering,
Nor must you hold your mistress' worth so cheap.
Enhance it, rather,—urge that blood is blood—
The daughter of the Burgraves, Landgraves, Markgraves,
Remains their daughter! I shall scarce gainsay.
Elsewhere or here, the lady needs must rule:
Like the imperial crown's great chrysoprase,
They talk of—somewhat out of keeping there,
And yet no jewel for a meaner cap.

Val. You wed the Duchess?

Berth. Cry you mercy, friend!

Will the match also influence fortunes here?
A natural solicitude enough.
Be certain, no bad chance it proves for you!
However high you take your present stand,
There 's prospect of a higher still remove—
For Juliers will not be my resting-place,
And, when I have to choose a substitute
To rule the little burgh, I 'll think of you.
You need not give your mates a character.
And yet I doubt your fitness to supplant
The grey smooth Chamberlain: he 'd hesitate
A doubt his lady could demean herself
So low as to accept me. Courage, sir!
I like your method better: feeling's play
Is franker much, and flatters me beside.

Val. I am to say, you love her?

Berth.

Say that too!

Love has no great concernment, thinks the world,
With a Duke's marriage. How go precedents
In Juliers' story—how use Juliers' Dukes?
I see you have them here in goodly row;
Yon must be Luitpold—ay, a stalwart sire!
—Say, I have been arrested suddenly
In my ambition's course, its rocky course,
By this sweet flower: I fain would gather it
And then proceed—so say and speedily
—(Nor stand there like Duke Luitpold's brazen self!)
Enough, sir: you possess my mind, I think.
This is my claim, the others being withdrawn,

And to this be it that, i' the Hall to-night,
Your lady's answer comes ; till when, farewell !

[*He retires.*]

Val. [*after a pause.*] The heavens and earth stay as
they were ; my heart

Beats as it beat : the truth remains the truth.
What falls away, then, if not faith in her ?
Was it my faith, that she could estimate
Love's value, and, such faith still guiding me,
Dare I now test her ? Or grew faith so strong
Solely because no power of test was mine ?

Enter the DUCHESS.

The D. My fate, sir ! Ah, you turn away. All 's over.
But you are sorry for me ? Be not so !
What I might have become, and never was,
Regret with me ! What I have merely been,
Rejoice I am no longer ! What I seem
Beginning now, in my new state, to be,
Hope that I am !—for, once my rights proved void,
This heavy roof seems easy to exchange
For the blue sky outside—my lot henceforth.

Val. And what a lot is Berthold's !

The D.

How of him ?

Val. He gathers earth's whole good into his arms ;
Standing, as man now, stately, strong and wise,
Marching to fortune, not surprised by her.
One great aim, like a guiding-star, above—
Which tasks strength, wisdom, stateliness, to lift
His manhood to the height that takes the prize ;

A prize not near—lest overlooking earth
He rashly spring to seize it—nor remote,
So that he rest upon his path content :
But day by day, while shimmering grows shine,
And the faint circlet prophesies the orb,
He sees so much as, just evolving these,
The stateliness, the wisdom and the strength,
To due completion, will suffice this life,
And lead him at his grandest to the grave.
After this star, out of a night he springs ;
A beggar's cradle for the throne of thrones
He quits ; so, mounting, feels each step he mounts,
Nor, as from each to each exultingly
He passes, overleaps one grade of joy.
This, for his own good :—with the world, each gift
Of God and man,—reality, tradition,
Fancy and fact—so well environ him,
That as a mystic panoply they serve—
Of force, untenanted, to awe mankind,
And work his purpose out with half the world,
While he, their master, dexterously slipt
From such encumbrance, is meantime employed
With his own prowess on the other half.
Thus shall he prosper, every day's success
Adding, to what is he, a solid strength—
An æry might to what encircles him,
Till at the last, so life's routine lends help,
That as the Emperor only breathes and moves,
His shadow shall be watched, his step or stalk

Become a comfort or a portent, how
 He trails his ermine take significance,—
 Till even his power shall cease to be most power,
 And men shall dread his weakness more, nor dare
 Peril their earth its bravest, first and best,
 Its typified invincibility.

Thus shall he go on, greatening, till he ends—
 The man of men, the spirit of all flesh,
 The fiery centre of an earthly world !

The D. Some such a fortune I had dreamed should rise
 Out of my own—that is, above my power
 Seemed other, greater potencies to stretch—

Val. For you ?

The D. It was not I moved there, I think :
 But one I could,—though constantly beside,
 And aye approaching,—still keep distant from,
 And so adore. 'T was a man moved there.

Val. Who ?

The D. I felt the spirit, never saw the face.

Val. See it ! 'T is Berthold's ! He enables you
 To realize your vision.

The D. Berthold ?

Val. Duke—

Emperor to be : he proffers you his hand.

The D. Generous and princely !

Val. He is all of this.

The D. Thanks, Berthold, for my father's sake. No
 hand

Degrades me !

Val. You accept the proffered hand ?

The D. That he should love me !

Val. " Loved " I did not say !

Had that been—love might so incline the Prince
To the world's good, the world that 's at his foot,—
I do not know, this moment, I should dare
Desire that you refused the world—and Cleves—
The sacrifice he asks.

The D. Not love me, sir ?

Val. He scarce affirmed it.

The D. May not deeds affirm ?

Val. What does he ? . . . Yes, yes, very much he does !
All the shame saved, he thinks, and sorrow saved—
Immitigable sorrow, so he thinks,—
Sorrow that 's deeper than we dream, perchance !

The D. Is not this love ?

Val. So very much he does !

For look, you can descend now gracefully :
All doubts are banished, that the world might have,
Or worst, the doubts yourself, in after-time,
May call up of your heart's sincereness now.
To such, reply, " I could have kept my rule—
" Increased it to the utmost of my dreams—
" Yet I abjured it." This, he does for you :
It is munificently much.

The D. Still " much ! "

But why is it not love, sir ? Answer me !

Val. Because not one of Berthold's words and looks
Had gone with love's presentment of a flower

To the beloved : because bold confidence,
 Open superiority, free pride—
 Love owns not, yet were all that Berthold owned :
 Because where reason, even, finds no flaw,
 Unerringly a lover's instinct may.

The D. You reason, then, and doubt?

Val. I love, and know.

The D. You love?—How strange ! I never cast a
 thought

On that ! Just see our selfishness ! You seemed
 So much my own . . . I had no ground—and yet,
 I never dreamed another might divide
 My power with you, much less exceed it.

Val. Lady,

I am yours wholly.

The D. Oh, no, no, not mine !

'T is not the same now, never more can be.

—Your first love, doubtless. Well, what 's gone from
 me ?

What have I lost in you ?

Val. My heart replies—

No loss there ! So, to Berthold back again :
 This offer of his hand, he bids me make—
 Its obvious magnitude is well to weigh.

The D. She 's . . . yes, she must be very fair for you !

Val. I am a simple advocate of Cleves.

The D. You ! With the heart and brain that so
 helped me,

I fancied them exclusively my own,

Yet find are subject to a stronger sway !

She must be . . . tell me, is she very fair ?

Val. Most fair, beyond conception or belief.

The D. Black eyes ?—no matter ! Colombe, the world
leads

Its life without you, whom your friends professed

The only woman—see how true they spoke !

One lived this while, who never saw your face,

Nor heard your voice—unless . . . Is she from Cleves ?

Val. Cleves knows her well.

The D.

Ah—just a fancy, now !

When you poured forth the wrongs of Cleves,—I said,

—Thought, that is, afterward . . .

Val.

You thought of me ?

The D. Of whom else ? Only such great cause, I
thought,

For such effect : see what true love can do !

Cleves is his love. I almost fear to ask

. . . And will not. This is idling : to our work !

Admit before the Prince, without reserve,

My claims misgrounded ; then may follow better

. . . When you poured out Cleves' wrongs impetuously,

Was she in your mind ?

Val.

All done was done for her

—To humble me !

The D.

She will be proud at least.

Val. She ?

The D.

When you tell her.

Val.

That will never be.

The D. How—are there sweeter things you hope to tell?
 No, sir ! You counselled me,—I counsel you
 In the one point I—any woman—can.
 Your worth, the first thing ; let her own come next—
 Say what you did through her, and she through you—
 The praises of her beauty afterward !
 Will you ?

Val. I dare not.

The D. Dare not ?

Val. She I love

Suspects not such a love in me.

The D. You jest.

Val. The lady is above me and away.

Not only the brave form, and the bright mind,
 And the great heart, combine to press me low—
 But all the world calls rank divides us.

The D. Rank !

Now grant me patience ! Here 's a man declares
 Oracularly in another's case—
 Sees the true value and the false, for them—
 Nay, bids them see it, and they straight do see.
 You called my court's love worthless—so it turned :
 I threw away as dross my heap of wealth,
 And here you stickle for a piece or two !
 First—has she seen you ?

Val. Yes.

The D. She loves you, then.

Val. One flash of hope burst ; then succeeded night :
 And all 's at darkest now. Impossible !

The D. We 'll try : you are—so to speak—my subject yet?

Val. As ever—to the death.

The D. Obey me, then !

Val. I must.

The D. Approach her, and . . . no ! first of all
Get more assurance. “ My instructress,” say,
“ Was great, descended from a line of kings,
“ And even fair ”—(wait why I say this folly)—
“ She said, of all men, none for eloquence,
“ Courage, and (what cast even these to shade)
“ The heart they sprung from,—none deserved like him
“ Who saved her at her need : if she said this,
“ What should not one I love, say ? ”

Val. Heaven—this hope—
Oh lady, you are filling me with fire !

The D. Say this !—nor think I bid you cast aside
One touch of all the awe and reverence ;
Nay—make her proud for once to heart's content
That all this wealth of heart and soul 's her own !
Think you are all of this,—and, thinking it,
. . . (Obey !)

Val. I cannot choose.

The D. Then, kneel to her—
[VALENCE sinks on his knee.

I dream !

Val. Have mercy ! Yours, unto the death,—
I have obeyed. Despise, and let me die !

The D. Alas, sir, is it to be ever thus ?

Even with you as with the world? I know
This morning's service was no vulgar deed
Whose motive, once it dares avow itself,
Explains all done and infinitely more,
So, takes the shelter of a nobler cause.
Your service named its true source,—loyalty!
The rest 's unsaid again. The Duchess bids you,
Rise, sir! The Prince's words were in debate.

Val. [rising.] Rise? Truth, as ever, lady, comes from
you!

I should rise—I who spoke for Cleves, can speak
For Man—yet tremble now, who stood firm then.
I laughed—for 't was past tears—that Cleves should
starve

With all hearts beating loud the infamy,
And no tongue daring trust as much to air:
Yet here, where all hearts speak, shall I be mute?
Oh lady, for your own sake look on me!
On all I am, and have, and do—heart, brain,
Body and soul,—this Valence and his gifts!
I was proud once: I saw you, and they sank,
So that each, magnified a thousand times,
Were nothing to you—but such nothingness,
Would a crown gild it, or a sceptre prop,
A treasure speed, a laurel-wreath enhance?
What is my own desert? But should your love
Have . . . there's no language helps here . . singled me,—
Then—oh, that wild word “then!”—be just to love,
In generosity its attribute!

Love, since you pleased to love ! All's cleared—a stage
For trial of the question kept so long :
Judge you—Is love or vanity the best ?
You, solve it for the world's sake—you, speak first
What all will shout one day—you, vindicate
Our earth and be its angel ! All is said.
Lady, I offer nothing—I am yours :
But, for the cause' sake, look on me and him,
And speak !

The D. I have received the Prince's message :
Say, I prepare my answer !

Val. Take me, Cleves !

[He withdraws]

The D. Mournful—that nothing's what it calls itself !
Devotion, zeal, faith, loyalty—mere love !
And, love in question, what may Berthold's be ?
I did ill to mistrust the world so soon :
Already was this Berthold at my side.
The valley-level has its hawks no doubt :
May not the rock-top have its eagles, too ?
Yet Valence . . . let me see his rival then !

ACT V.

*Night. SCENE. The Hall.**Enter BERTHOLD and MELCHIOR.**Mel.* And here you wait the matter's issue?*Berth.*

Here.

Mel. I don't regret I shut Amelius, then.
But tell me, on this grand disclosure,—how
Behaved our spokesman with the forehead?*Berth.*

Oh,

Turned out no better than the foreheadless—
Was dazzled not so very soon, that's all!
For my part, this is scarce the hasty showy
Chivalrous measure you give me credit of.
Perhaps I had a fancy,—but 't is gone.
—Let her commence the unfriended innocent
And carry wrongs about from court to court?
No, truly! The least shake of fortune's sand,
—My uncle-Pope chokes in a coughing fit,
King-cousin takes a fancy to blue eyes,—
And wondrously her claims would brighten up;
Forth comes a new gloss on the ancient law,
O'er-looked provisoes, o'er-past premises,
Follow in plenty. No: 't is the safe step.
The hour beneath the convent-wall is lost:
Juliers and she, once mine, are ever mine.

Mel. Which is to say, you, losing heart already,
Elude the adventure.

Berth. Not so—or, if so—
Why not confess at once that I advise
None of our kingly craft and guild just now
To lay, one moment, down their privilege
With the notion they can any time at pleasure
Retake it : that may turn out hazardous.
We seem, in Europe, pretty well at end
O' the night, with our great masque : those favoured few
Who keep the chamber's top, and honour's chance
Of the early evening, may retain their place
And figure as they list till out of breath.
But it is growing late : and I observe
A dim grim kind of tipstaves at the doorway
Not only bar new-comers entering now,
But caution those who left, for any cause,
And would return, that morning draws too near ;
The ball must die off, shut itself up. We—
I think, may dance lights out and sunshine in,
And sleep off headache on our frippery :
But friend the other, who cunningly stole out,
And, after breathing the fresh air outside,
Means to re-enter with a new costume,
Will be advised go back to bed, I fear.
I stick to privilege, on second thoughts.

Mel. Yes—you evade the adventure : and, beside,
Give yourself out for colder than you are.
King Philip, only, notes the lady's eyes ?

Don't they come in for somewhat of the motive
With you too?

Berth. Yes—no : I am past that now.
Gone 't is : I cannot shut my soul to fact.
Of course, I might by forethought and contrivance
Reason myself into a rapture. Gone :
And something better come instead, no doubt.

Mel. So be it ! Yet, all the same, proceed my way,
Though to your ends ; so shall you prosper best !
The lady,—to be won for selfish ends,—
Will be won easier my unselfish . . . call it,
Romantic way.

Berth. Won easier?

Mel. Will not she?

Berth. There I profess humility without bound :
Ill cannot speed—not I—the Emperor.

Mel. And I should think the Emperor best waived,
From your description of her mood and way.
You could look, if it pleased you, into hearts ;
But are too indolent and fond of watching
Your own—you know that, for you study it.

Berth. Had you but seen the orator her friend,
So bold and voluble an hour before,
Abashed to earth at aspect of the change !
Make her an Empress ? Ah, that changed the case !
Oh, I read hearts ! 'T is for my own behoof,
I court her with my true worth : wait the event !
I learned my final lesson on that head
When years ago,—my first and last essay—

Before the priest my uncle could by help
 Of his superior, raise me from the dirt—
 Friscilla left me for a Brabant lord
 Whose cheek was like the topaz on his thumb.
 I am past illusion on that score.

Mel.

Here comes

The lady—

Berth. —And there you go. But do not! Give me
 Another chance to please you! Hear me plead!

Mel. You 'll keep, then, to the lover, to the man?

Enter the DUCHESS—followed by ADOLF and SABYNE, and after an interval, by the Courtiers.

Berth. Good auspice to our meeting!

The D.

May it prove!

—And you, sir, will be Emperor one day?

Berth. (Ay, that 's the point!) I may be Emperor

The D. 'T is not for my sake only, I am proud

Of this you offer: I am prouder far

That from the highest state should duly spring

The highest, since most generous, of deeds.

Berth. (Generous—still that!) You underrate yourself.

You are, what I, to be complete, must have—

Find now, and may not find, another time.

While I career on all the world for stage,

There needs at home my representative.

The D.—Such, rather, would some warrior-woman be—
 One dowered with lands and gold, or rich in friends—
 One like yourself.

Berth.

Lady, I am myself,

And have all these : I want what 's not myself,
 Nor has all these. Why give one hand two swords?
 Here 's one already : be a friend's next gift
 A silk glove, if you will—I have a sword.

The D. You love me, then ?

Berth. Your lineage I revere,

Honour your virtue, in your truth believe,
 Do homage to your intellect, and bow
 Before your peerless beauty.

The D. But, for love—

Berth. A further love I do not understand.

Our best course is to say these hideous truths,
 And see them, once said, grow endurable :
 Like waters shuddering from their central bed,
 Black with the midnight bowels of the earth,
 That, once up-spouted by an earthquake's throe,
 A portent and a terror—soon subside,
 Freshen apace, take gold and rainbow hues
 In sunshine, sleep in shadow, and at last
 Grow common to the earth as hills or trees—
 Accepted by all things they came to scare.

The D. You cannot love, then ?

Berth. —Charlemagne, perhaps !

Are you not over-curious in love-lore ?

The D. I have become so, very recently.

It seems, then, I shall best deserve esteem,
 Respect, and all your candour promises,
 By putting on a calculating mood—
 Asking the terms of my becoming yours ?

Berth. Let me not do myself injustice, neither.
 Because I will not condescend to fictions
 That promise what my soul can ne'er acquit,
 It does not follow that my guarded phrase
 May not include far more of what you seek,
 Than wide profession of less scrupulous men.
 You will be Empress, once for all : with me
 The Pope disputes supremacy—you stand,
 And none gainsays, the earth's first woman.

The D.

That—

Or simple Lady of Ravestein again ?

Berth. The matter 's not in my arbitrament :
 Now I have made my claims—which I regret—
 Cede one, cede all.

The D.

This claim then, you enforce ?

Berth. The world looks on.

The D.

And when must I decide ?

Berth. When, lady ? Have I said thus much so
 promptly

For nothing ?—Poured out, with such pains, at once
 What I might else have suffered to ooze forth
 Droplet by droplet in a lifetime long—
 For aught less than as prompt an answer, too ?
 All 's fairly told now : who can teach you more ?

The D. I do not see him.

Berth.

I shall ne'er deceive.

This offer should be made befittingly
 Did time allow the better setting forth
 The good of it, with what is not so good,

Advantage, and disparagement as well :
But as it is, the sum of both must serve.
I am already weary of this place ;
My thoughts are next stage on to Rome. Decide !
The Empire—or,—not even Juliers now !
Hail to the Empress—farewell to the Duchess !

[*The Courtiers, who have been drawing nearer and nearer, interpose.*]

Gau. —“ Farewell,” Prince? when we break in at
our risk—

Clug. Almost upon court-licence trespassing—

Gau. —To point out how your claims are valid
yet !

You know not, by the Duke her father's will,
The lady, if she weds beneath her rank,
Forfeits her Duchy in the next heir's favour—
So 't is expressly stipulate. And if
It can be shown 't is her intent to wed
A subject, then yourself, next heir, by right
Succeed to Juliers.

Berth. What insanity?—

Gui. Sir, there 's one Valence, the pale fiery man
You saw and heard this morning—thought, no doubt,
Was of considerable standing here :
I put it to your penetration, Prince,
If aught save love, the truest love for her
Could make him serve the lady as he did !
He 's simply a poor advocate of Cleves
—Creeps here with difficulty, finds a place

With danger, gets in by a miracle,
And for the first time meets the lady's face—
So runs the story : is that credible ?
For, first—no sooner in, than he 's apprised
Fortunes have changed ; you are all-powerful here,
The lady as powerless : he stands fast by her !

The D. [Aside.] And do such deeds spring up from
love alone ?

Gui. But here occurs the question, does the lady
Love him again ? I say, how else can she ?
Can she forget how he stood singly forth
In her defence, dared outrage all of us,
Insult yourself—for what, save love's reward ?

The D. [Aside.] And is love then the sole reward of
love ?

Gui. But, love him as she may and must—you ask,
Means she to wed him ? “Yes,” both natures answer !
Both, in their pride, point out the sole result ;
Nought less would he accept nor she propose.
For each conjecture was she great enough
—Will be, for this.

Clug. Though, now that this is known,
Policy, doubtless, urges she deny . . .

The D.—What, sir, and wherefore ?—since I am not
sure

That all is any other than you say !
You take this Valence, hold him close to me,
Him with his actions : can I choose but look ?
I am not sure, love trulier shows itself

Than in this man, you hate and would degrade,
 Yet, with your worst abatement, show me thus.
 Nor am I—(thus made look within myself,
 Ere I had dared)—now that the look is dared—
 Sure that I do not love him !

Gui.

Hear you, Prince ?

Berth. And what, sirs, please you, may this prattle
 mean

Unless to prove with what alacrity
 You give your lady's secrets to the world ?
 How much indebted, for discovering
 That quality, you make me, will be found
 When there 's a keeper for my own to seek.

Courtiers. " Our lady ? "

Berth.

—She assuredly remains.

The D. Ah, Prince—and you too can be generous ?
 You could renounce your power, if this were so,
 And let me, as these phrase it, wed my love
 Yet keep my Duchy ? You perhaps exceed
 Him, even, in disinterestedness !

Berth. How, lady, should all this affect my purpose ?
 Your will and choice are still as ever, free.
 Say, you have known a worthier than myself
 In mind and heart, of happier form and face—
 Others must have their birthright : I have gifts.
 To balance theirs, not blot them out of sight,
 Against a hundred alien qualities,
 I lay the prize I offer. I am nothing :
 Wed you the Empire ?

The D.

And my heart away?

Berth. When have I made pretension to your heart?
 I give none. I shall keep your honour safe;
 With mine I trust you, as the sculptor trusts
 Yon marble woman with the marble rose,
 Loose on her hand, she never will let fall,
 In graceful, slight, silent security.
 You will be proud of my world-wide career,
 And I content in you the fair and good.
 What were the use of planting a few seeds,
 The thankless climate never would mature—
 Affections all repelled by circumstance?
 Enough: to these no credit I attach,—
 To what you own, find nothing to object.
 Write simply on my requisition's face
 What shall content my friends—that you admit,
 As Colombe of Ravestein, the claims therein,
 Or never need admit them, as my wife—
 And either way, all 's ended!

The D.

Let all end!

Berth. The requisition!

Gui.

—Valence holds, of course!

Berth. Desire his presence!

[ADOLF goes out.]

Courtiers [to each other.] Out it all comes yet;
 He 'll have his word against the bargain yet:
 He 's not the man to tamely acquiesce.
 One passionate appeal—upbraiding even,
 May turn the tide again. Despair not yet!

[*They retire a little*]

Berth. [to MELCHIOR.] The Empire has its old success,
my friend !

Mel. You 've had your way : before the spokesman
speaks,

Let me, but this once, work a problem out,
And ever more be dumb ! The Empire wins ?
To better purpose have I read my books !

Enter VALENCE.

Mel. [to the Courtiers.] Apart, my masters !

[To VALENCE.] Sir, one word with you !

I am a poor dependant of the Prince's—
Pitched on to speak, as of slight consequence.
You are no higher, I find : in other words,
We two, as probably the wisest here,
Need not hold diplomatic talk like fools.
Suppose I speak, divesting the plain fact
Of all their tortuous phrases, fit for them ?
Do you reply so, and what trouble saved !
The Prince, then—an embroiled strange heap of news
This moment reaches him—if true or false,
All dignity forbids he should inquire
In person, or by worthier deputy ;
Yet somehow must inquire, lest slander come :
And so, 't is I am pitched on. You have heard
His offer to your lady ?

Val. Yes.

Mel. —Conceive

Her joy thereat ?

Val. I cannot.

Mel.

No one can :

All draws to a conclusion, therefore.

Val. [Aside.]

So !

No after-judgment—no first thought revised—

Her first and last decision !—me, she leaves,

Takes him ; a simple heart is flung aside,

The ermine o'er a heartless breast embraced.

Oh Heaven, this mockery has been played too oft !

Once, to surprise the angels—twice, that fiends

Recording, might be proud they chose not so—

Thrice, many thousand times, to teach the world

All men should pause, misdoubt their strength, since men

Can have such chance yet fail so signally,

—But ever, ever this farewell to Heaven,

Welcome to earth—this taking death for life—

This spurning love and kneeling to the world—

Oh Heaven, it is too often and too old !

Mel. Well, on this point, what but an absurd rumour

Arises—these, its source—its subject, you !

Your faith and loyalty misconstruing,

They say, your service claims the lady's hand !

Of course, nor Prince nor lady can respond :

Yet something must be said : for, were it true

You made such claim, the Prince would . . .

Val.

Well sir,—would ?

Mel. —Not only probably withdraw his suit,

But, very like, the lady might be forced

Accept your own. Oh, there are reasons why !

But you 'll excuse at present all save one,—

I think so. What we want is, your own witness,
For, or against—her good, or yours : decide !

Val. [*Aside.*] Be it her good if she accounts it so !

[*After a contest.*] For what am I but hers, to choose as
she ?

Who knows how far, beside, the light from her
May reach, and dwell with, what she looks upon ?

Mel. [*to the Prince.*] Now to him, you !

Berth. [*to VALENCE.*] My friend acquaints you, sir,
The noise runs . . .

Val. —Prince, how fortunate are you,
Wedding her as you will, in spite of noise,
To show belief in love ! Let her but love you,
All else you disregard ! What else can be ?
You know how love is incompatible
With falsehood—purifies, assimilates
All other passions to itself.

Mel. Ay, sir :

But softly ! Where, in the object we select,
Such love is, perchance, wanting ?

Val. Then indeed,
What is it you can take ?

Mel. Nay, ask the world !

Youth, beauty, virtue, an illustrious name,
An influence o'er mankind.

Val. When man perceives . . .

—Ah, I can only speak as for myself !

The D. Speak for yourself !

Val. May I ?—no, I have spoken,

And time 's gone by. Had I seen such an one,
As I loved her—weighing thoroughly that word—
So should my task be to evolve her love :
If for myself !—if for another—well.

Berth. Heroic truly ! And your sole reward,—
The secret pride in yielding up love's right ?

Val. Who thought upon reward ? And yet, now
much

Comes after—oh what amplest recompense !
Is the knowledge of her, nought ? the memory, nought ?
——Lady, should such an one have looked on you,
Ne'er wrong yourself so far as quote the world
And say, love can go unrequited here !
You will have blessed him to his whole life's end—
Low passions hindered, baser cares kept back,
All goodness cherished where you dwelt—and dwell.
What would he have ? He holds you — you, both
form

And mind, in his,—where self-love makes such room
For love of you, he would not serve you now
The vulgar way,—repulse your enemies,
Win you new realms, or best, in saving old
Die blissfully—that 's past so long ago !
He wishes you no need, thought, care of him—
Your good, by any means, himself unseen,
Away, forgotten !—He gives that life's task up,
As it were . . . but this charge which I return—

[*Offers the requisition, which she takes.*

Wishing your good.

The D. [*having subscribed it.*] And opportunely, sir—
 Since at a birthday's close, like this of mine,
 Good wishes gentle deeds reciprocate.
 Most on a wedding-day, as mine is too,
 Should gifts be thought of : yours comes first by right.
 Ask of me !

Berth. He shall have whate'er he asks,
 For your sake and his own.

Val. [*Aside.*] If I should ask—
 The withered bunch of flowers she wears—perhaps,
 One last touch of her hand, I never more
 Shall see !

[*After a pause, presenting his paper to the Prince.*

Cleves' Prince, redress the wrongs of Cleves !

Berth. I will, sir.

The D. [*as VALENCE prepares to retire.*]—Nay, do out
 your duty, first !

You bore this paper ; I have registered
 My answer to it : read it and have done !

[*VALENCE reads it.*

I take him—give up Juliers and the world.

This is my Birthday.

Mel. Berthold, my one hero
 Of the world she gives up, one friend worth my books,
 Sole man I think it pays the pains to watch,—
 Speak, for I know you through your Popes and Kings !

Berth. [*after a pause.*] Lady, well rewarded ! Sir, as
 well deserved !

I could not imitate—I hardly envy—

I do admire you. All is for the best.
Too costly a flower were this, I see it now,
To pluck and set upon my barren helm
To wither—any garish plume will do.
I'll not insult you and refuse your Duchy—
You can so well afford to yield it me,
And I were left, without it, sadly off.
As it is—for me—if that will flatter you,
A somewhat wearier life seems to remain
Than I thought possible where . . . 'faith, their life
Begins already! They're too occupied
To listen: and few words content me best.
[*Abruptly to the Courtiers.*] I am your Duke, though!
Who obey me here?

The D. Adolf and Sabyne follow us—

Gui. [*starting from the Courtiers.*]——And I?
Do I not follow them, if I mayn't you?
Shall not I get some little duties up
At Ravestein and emulate the rest?
God save you, Gaucelme! 'T is my Birthday, too!

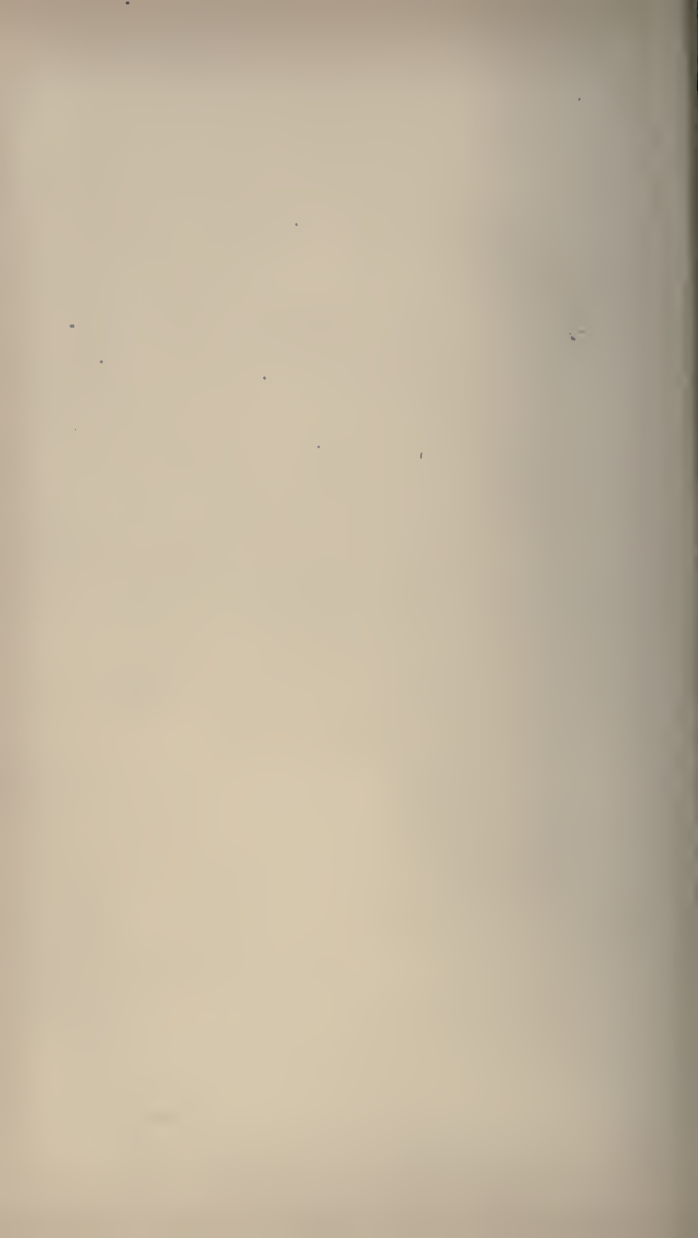
Berth. You happy handful that remain with me
. . . That is, with Dietrich the black Barnabite
I shall leave over you—will earn your wages,
Or Dietrich has forgot to ply his trade!
Meantime,—go copy me the precedents
Of every installation, proper styles
And pedigrees of all your Juliers' Dukes—
While I prepare to plod on my old way,
And somewhat wearily, I must confess!

The D. [*with a light joyous laugh as she turns from them.*] Come, Valence, to our friends, God's earth . . .

Val. [*as she falls into his arms.*]—And thee !



DRAMATIC ROMANCES.



DRAMATIC ROMANCES.

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP.

I.

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon :

A mile or so away

On a little mound, Napoleon

Stood on our storming-day ;

With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,

Legs wide, arms locked behind,

As if to balance the prone brow

Oppressive with its mind.

II.

Just as perhaps he mused " My plans

" That soar, to earth may fall,

" Let once my army-leader Lannes

" Waver at yonder wall,"—

Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew

A rider, bound on bound

Full-galloping ; nor bridle drew

Until he reached the mound.

III.

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy :
You hardly could suspect—
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

IV.

" Well," cried he, " Emperor, by God's grace
" We 've got you Ratisbon !
" The Marshal 's in the market-place,
" And you 'll be there anon
" To see your flag-bird flap his vans
" Where I, to heart's desire,
" Perched him !" The chief's eye flashed ; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

V.

The chief's eye flashed ; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle's eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes ;
" You're wounded !" " Nay," the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said :
" I 'm killed, Sire !" And his chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead.

THE PATRIOT.

AN OLD STORY.

I.

It was roses, roses, all the way,
 With myrtle mixed in my path like mad :
 The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
 The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
 A year ago on this very day.

II.

The air broke into a mist with bells,
 The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
 Had I said, "Good folk, mere noise repels—
 "But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
 They had answered, "And afterward, what else?"

III.

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
 To give it my loving friends to keep!
 Nought man could do, have I left undone :
 And you see my harvest, what I reap
 This very day, now a year is run.

IV.

There's nobody on the house-tops now—
 Just a palsied few at the windows set;

For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

v.

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind ;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

vi.

Thus I entered, and thus I go !
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
“ Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
“ Me ? ”—God might question ; now instead
’T is God shall repay : I am safer so.

MY LAST DUCHESS.

FERRARA.

THAT'S my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now : Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her ? I said
“ Frà Pandolf ” by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
 How such a glance came there ; so, not the first
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek : perhaps
 Frà Pandolf chanced to say " Her mantle laps
 " Over my lady's wrist too much," or " Paint
 " Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 " Half-flush that dies along her throat : " such stuff
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had
 A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed ; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere. .
 Sir, 't was all one ! My favour at her breast,
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace—all and each
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good ! but
 thanked
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who 'd stoop to blame

This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, “ Just this
“ Or that in you disgusts me ; here you miss,
“ Or there exceed the mark ”—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E’en then would be some stooping ; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene’er I passed her ; but who passed without
Much the same smile ? This grew ; I gave commands ;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will ’t please you rise ? We ’ll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master’s known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed ;
Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we ’ll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me !

COUNT GISMOND.

AIX IN PROVENCE.

I.

CHRIST God who savest man, save most
 Of men Count Gismond who saved me !
 Count Gauthier, when he chose his post,
 Chose time and place and company
 To suit it ; when he struck at length
 My honour, 't was with all his strength.

II.

And doubtlessly ere he could draw
 All points to one, he must have schemed !
 That miserable morning saw
 Few half so happy as I seemed,
 While being dressed in queen's array
 To give our tourney prize away.

III.

I thought they loved me, did me grace
 To please themselves ; 't was all their deed ;
 God makes, or fair or foul, our face ;
 If showing mine so caused to bleed
 My cousins' hearts, they should have dropped
 A word, and straight the play had stopped.

IV.

They, too, so beauteous ! Each a queen
By virtue of her brow and breast ;
Not needing to be crowned, I mean,
As I do. E'en when I was dressed,
Had either of them spoke, instead
Of glancing sideways with still head !

V.

But no : they let me laugh, and sing
My birthday song quite through, adjust
The last rose in my garland, fling
A last look on the mirror, trust
My arms to each an arm of theirs,
And so descend the castle-stairs—

VI.

And come out on the morning-troop
Of merry friends who kissed my cheek,
And called me queen, and made me stoop
Under the canopy—(a streak
That pierced it, of the outside sun,
Powdered with gold its gloom's soft dun)—

VII.

And they could let me take my state
And foolish throne amid applause
Of all come there to celebrate
My queen's-day—Oh I think the cause
Of much was, they forgot no crowd
Makes up for parents in their shroud !

VIII.

However that be, all eyes were bent
 Upon me, when my cousins cast
 Theirs down ; 't was time I should present
 The victor's crown, but . . . there, 't will last
 No long time . . . the old mist again
 Blinds me as then it did. How vain !

IX.

See ! Gismond 's at the gate, in talk
 With his two boys : I can proceed.
 Well, at that moment, who should stalk
 Forth boldly—to my face, indeed—
 But Gauthier, and he thundered "Stay !" !
 And all stayed. "Bring no crowns, I say !

X.

"Bring torches ! Wind the penance-sheet
 "About her ! Let her shun the chaste,
 "Or lay herself before their feet !
 "Shall she whose body I embraced
 "A night long, queen it in the day ?
 "For honour's sake no crowns, I say !"

XI.

I ? What I answered ? As I live,
 I never fancied such a thing
 As answer possible to give.
 What says the body when they spring
 Some monstrous torture-engine's whole
 Strength on it ? No more says the soul.

XII.

Till out strode Gismond ; then I knew
That I was saved. I never met
His face before, but, at first view,
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan ; who would spend
A minute's mistrust on the end ?

XIII.

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat
Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth
With one back-handed blow that wrote
In blood men's verdict there. North, South,
East, West, I looked. The lie was dead,
And damned, and truth stood up instead.

XIV.

This glads me most, that I enjoyed
The heart of the joy, with my content
In watching Gismond unalloyed
By any doubt of the event :
God took that on him—I was bid
Watch Gismond for my part : I did.

XV.

Did I not watch him while he let
His armourer just brace his greaves,
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret
The while ! His foot . . . my memory leaves
No least stamp out, nor how anon
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on.

XVI.

And e'en before the trumpet's sound
 Was finished, prone lay the false knight,
 Prone as his lie, upon the ground :
 Gismond flew at him, used no sleight
 O' the sword, but open-breasted drove,
 Cleaving till out the truth he clove.

XVII.

Which done, he dragged him to my feet
 And said " Here die, but end thy breath
 " In full confession, lest thou fleet
 " From my first, to God's second death !
 " Say, hast thou lied ? " And, " I have lied
 " To God and her," he said, and died.

XVIII.

Then Gismond, kneeling to me, asked
 —What safe my heart holds, though no word
 Could I repeat now, if I tasked
 My powers for ever, to a third
 Dear even as you are. Pass the rest
 Until I sank upon his breast.

XIX.

Over my head his arm he flung
 Against the world ; and scarce I felt
 His sword (that dripped by me and swung)
 A little shifted in its belt :
 For he began to say the while
 How South our home lay many a mile.

XX.

So 'mid the shouting multitude
We two walked forth to never more
Return. My cousins have pursued
Their life, untroubled as before
I vexed them. Gauthier's dwelling-place
God lighten ! May his soul find grace !

XXI.

Our elder boy has got the clear
Great brow ; tho' when his brother's black
Full eye shows scorn, it . . . Gismond here ?
And have you brought my tercel back ?
I just was telling Adela
How many birds it struck since May.

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL.

MORNING, evening, noon and night,
" Praise God ! " sang Theocrite.

Then to his poor trade he turned,
Whereby the daily meal was earned.

Hard he laboured, long and well ;
O'er his work the boy's curls fell.

But ever, at each period,
He stopped and sang, " Praise God ! "

Then back again his curls he threw,
And cheerful turned to work anew.

Said Blaise, the listening monk, "Well done;
"I doubt not thou art heard, my son :

"As well as if thy voice to-day
"Were praising God, the Pope's great way.

"This Easter Day, the Pope at Rome
"Praises God from Peter's dome."

Said Theocrite, "Would God that I
"Might praise him, that great way, and die !"

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.

With God a day endures alway,
A thousand years are but a day.

God said in heaven, "Nor day nor night
"Now brings the voice of my delight."

Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,
Spread his wings and sank to earth ;

Entered, in flesh, the empty cell,
Lived there, and played the craftsman well ;

And morning, evening, noon and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite.

And from a boy, to youth he grew :
The man put off the stripling's hue :

The man matured and fell away
Into the season of decay :

And ever o'er the trade he bent,
And ever lived on earth content.

(He did God's will ; to him, all one
If on the earth or in the sun.)

God said, " A praise is in mine ear ;
" There is no doubt in it, no fear :

" So sing old worlds, and so
" New worlds that from my footstool go.

" Clearer loves sound other ways :
" I miss my little human praise."

Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.

'T was Easter Day : he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.

In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,

With his holy vestments dight,
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite :

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

Since when, a boy, he plied his trade,
Till on his life the sickness weighed ;

And in his cell, when death drew near,
An angel in a dream brought cheer :

And rising from the sickness drear
He grew a priest, and now stood here.

To the East with praise he turned,
And on his sight the angel burned.

“ I bore thee from thy craftsman’s cell,
“ And set thee here ; I did not well.

“ Vainly I left my angel-sphere,
“ Vain was thy dream of many a year.

“ Thy voice’s praise seemed weak ; it dropped –
“ Creation’s chorus stopped !

“ Go back and praise again
“ The early way, while I remain.

“ With that weak voice of our disdain,
“ Take up creation’s pausing strain.

“ Back to the cell and poor employ :
“ Resume the craftsman and the boy ! ”

Theocrite grew old at home ;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter’s dome.

One vanished as the other died :
They sought God side by side.

INSTANS TYRANNUS.

I.

OF the million or two, more or less,
I rule and possess,
One man, for some cause undefined,
Was least to my mind.

II.

I struck him, he grovelled of course—
For, what was his force?
I pinned him to earth with my weight
And persistence of hate :
And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,
As his lot might be worse.

III.

“ Were the object less mean, would he stand
“ At the swing of my hand !
“ For obscurity helps him and blots
“ The hole where he squats.”
So, I set my five wits on the stretch
To inveigle the wretch.
All in vain ! Gold and jewels I threw,
Still he couched there perdue ;
I tempted his blood and his flesh,
Hid in roses my mesh,

Choicest cates and the flagon's best spilth :
Still he kept to his filth.

IV.

Had he kith now or kin, were access
To his heart, did I press :
Just a son or a mother to seize !
No such booty as these.
Were it simply a friend to pursue
'Mid my million or two,
Who could pay me in person or pelf
What he owes me himself !
No : I could not but smile through my chafe :
For the fellow lay safe
As his mates do, the midge and the nit,
—Through minuteness, to wit.

V.

'Then a humour more great took its place
At the thought of his face,
The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
The trouble uncouth
'Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
To put out of its pain.
And, "no !" I admonished myself,
"Is one mocked by an elf,
"Is one baffled by toad or by rat ?
"The gravamen 's in that !
"How the lion, who crouches to suit
"His back to my foot,

“ Would admire that I stand in debate !
“ But the small turns the great
“ If it vexes you,—that is the thing !
“ Toad or rat vex the king ?
“ Though I waste half my realm to unearth
“ Toad or rat, ’t is well worth ! ”

VI.

So, I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole, with never a break
Ran my fires for his sake ;
Over-head, did my thunder combine
With my under-ground mine :
Till I looked from my labour content
To enjoy the event.

VII.

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end ?
Did I say “ without friend ? ”
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe
With the sun’s self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest !
Do you see ? Just my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God’s skirts, and prayed !
—So, *I* was afraid !

MESMERISM.-

I.

ALL I believed is true !
 I am able yet
 All I want, to get
 By a method as strange as new :
 Dare I trust the same to you ?

II.

If at night, when doors are shut,
 And the wood-worm picks,
 And the death-watch ticks,
 And the bar has a flag of smut,
 And a cat 's in the water-butt—

III.

And the socket floats and flares,
 And the house-beams groan,
 And a foot unknown
 Is surmised on the garret-stairs,
 And the locks slip unawares—

IV.

And the spider, to serve his ends,
 By a sudden thread,
 Arms and legs outspread,
 On the table's midst descends,
 Comes to find, God knows what friends !—

V.

If since eve drew in, I say,
 I have sat and brought
 (So to speak) my thought
To bear on the woman away,
Till I felt my hair turn grey—

VI.

Till I seemed to have and hold,
 In the vacancy
 'Twixt the wall and me
From the hair-plait's chestnut-gold
To the foot in its muslin fold—

VII.

Have and hold, then and there,
 Her, from head to foot,
 Breathing and mute,
Passive and yet aware,
In the grasp of my steady stare—

VIII.

Hold and have, there and then,
 All her body and soul
 That completes my whole,
All that women add to men,
In the clutch of my steady ken—

IX.

Having and holding, till
 I imprint her fast

On the void at last
As the sun does whom he will
By the calotypist's skill—

x.

Then,—if my heart's strength serve,
And through all and each
Of the veils I reach
To her soul and never swerve,
Knitting an iron nerve—

xi.

Command her soul to advance
And inform the shape
Which has made escape
And before my countenance
Answers me glance for glance—

xii

I, still with a gesture fit
Of my hands that best
Do my soul's behest,
Pointing the power from it,
While myself do steadfast sit—

xiii.

Steadfast and still the same
On my object bent,
While the hands give vent
To my ardour and my aim
And break into very flame—

XIV.

Then I reach, I must believe,
Not her soul in vain,
For to me again
It reaches, and past retrieve
Is wound in the toils I weave ;

XV.

And must follow as I require.
As befits a thrall,
Bringing flesh and all,
Essence and earth-attire,
To the source of the tractile fire :

XVI.

Till the house called hers, not mine,
With a growing weight
Seems to suffocate
If she break not its leaden line
And escape from its close confine.

XVII.

Out of doors into the night !
On to the maze
Of the wild wood-ways,
Not turning to left nor right
From the pathway, blind with sight—

XVIII.

Making thro' rain and wind
O'er the broken shrubs,

'Twixt the stems and stubs,
With a still, composed, strong mind,
Nor a care for the world behind—

XIX.

Swifter and still more swift,
As the crowding peace
Doth to joy increase
In the wide blind eyes uplift
Thro' the darkness and the drift!

XX.

While I—to the shape, I too
Feel my soul dilate
Nor a whit abate,
And relax not a gesture due,
As I see my belief come true.

XXI.

For, there! have I drawn or no
Life to that lip?
Do my fingers dip
In a flame which again they throw
On the cheek that breaks a-glow?

XXII.

Ha! was the hair so first?
What, unfileted,
Made alive, and spread
Through the void with a rich outburst,
Chestnut gold-interspersed?

XXIII.

Like the doors of a casket-shrine,
See, on either side,
Her two arms divide
Till the heart betwixt makes sign,
Take me, for I am thine !

XXIV.

“ Now—now ”—the door is heard !
Hark, the stairs ! and near—
Nearer—and here—
“ Now ! ” and at call the third
She enters without a word.

XXV.

On doth she march and on
To the fancied shape ;
It is, past escape,
Herself, now : the dream is done
And the shadow and she are one.

XXVI.

First I will pray. Do Thou
That ownest the soul,
Yet wilt grant control
To another, nor disallow
For a time, restrain me now !

XXVII.

I admonish me while I may,
Not to squander guilt,
Since require Thou wilt

At my hand its price one day !
What the price is, who can say ?

THE GLOVE.

(PETER RONSARD *loquitur.*)

“ HEIGHO,” yawned one day King Francis,
“ Distance all value enhances !
“ When a man ’s busy, why, leisure
“ Strikes him as wonderful pleasure :
“ ’Faith, and at leisure once is he ?
“ Straightway he wants to be busy.
“ Here we ’ve got peace ; and aghast I ’m
“ Caught thinking war the true pastime.
“ Is there a reason in metre ?
“ Give us your speech, master Peter !”
I who, if mortal dare say so,
Ne’er am at loss with my Naso,
“ Sire,” I replied, “ joys prove cloudlers :
“ Men are the merest Ixions ”—
Here the King whistled aloud, “ Let ’s
“ . . . Heigho . . . go look at our lions !”
Such are the sorrowful chances
If you talk fine to King Francis.

And so, to the courtyard proceeding,
Our company, Francis was leading ;
Increased by new followers tenfold

Before he arrived at the penfold ;
Lords, ladies, like clouds which bedizen
At sunset the western horizon.
And Sir De Lorge pressed 'mid the foremost
With the dame he professed to adore most—
Oh, what a face ! . One by fits eyed
Her, and the horrible pitside ;
For the penfold surrounded a hollow
Which led where the eye scarce dared follow,
And shelved to the chamber secluded
Where Bluebeard, the great lion, brooded.
The King hailed his keeper, an Arab
As glossy and black as a scarab,
And bade him make sport and at once stir
Up and out of his den the old monster.
They opened a hole in the wire-work
Across it, and dropped there a firework,
And fled : one's heart's beating redoubled ;
A pause, while the pit's mouth was troubled,
The blackness and silence so utter,
By the firework's slow sparkling and sputter ;
Then earth in a sudden contortion
Gave out to our gaze her abortion.
Such a brute ! Were I friend Clement Marot
(Whose experience of nature's but narrow,
And whose faculties move in no small mist
When he versifies David the Psalmist)
I should study that brute to describe you
Illum Juda Leonem de Tribu.

One's whole blood grew curdling and creepy
 To see the black mane, vast and heapy,
 The tail in the air stiff and straining,
 The wide eyes, nor waxing nor waning,
 As over the barrier which bounded
 His platform, and us who surrounded
 The barrier, they reached and they rested
 O' the space that might stand him in best stead :
 For who knew, he thought, what the amazement,
 The eruption of clatter and blaze meant,
 And if, in this minute of wonder,
 No outlet, 'mid lightning and thunder,
 Lay broad, and, his shackles all shivered,
 The lion at last was delivered ?

Ay, that was the open sky o'erhead !
 And you saw by the flash on his forehead,
 By the hope in those eyes wide and steady,
 He was leagues in the desert already,
 Driving the flocks up the mountain,
 Or catlike couched hard by the fountain
 To waylay the date-gathering negress :
 So guarded he entrance or egress.

" How he stands ! " quoth the King : " we may well
 swear,

{ " No novice, we 've won our spurs elsewhere
 " And so can afford the confession,)

" We exercise wholesome discretion

" In keeping aloof from his threshold ;

" Once hold you, those jaws want no fresh hold,

“ Their first would too pleasantly purloin
“ The visitor’s brisket or surloin :
“ But who ’s he would prove so fool-hardy ?
“ Not the best man of Marignan, pardie ! ”

The sentence no sooner was uttered,
Than over the rails a glove fluttered,
Fell close to the lion, and rested :
The dame ’t was, who flung it and jested
With life so, De Lorge had been wooing
For months past ; he sat there pursuing
His suit, weighing out with nonchalance
Fine speeches like gold from a balance.

Sound the trumpet, no true knight ’s a tarrier !
De Lorge made one leap at the barrier,
Walked straight to the glove,—while the lion
Ne’er moved, kept his far-reaching eye on
The palm-tree-edged desert-spring’s sapphire,
And the musky oiled skin of the Kaffir,—
Picked it up, and as calmly retreated,
Leaped back where the lady was seated,
And full in the face of its owner
Flung the glove.

“ Your heart’s queen, you dethrone her ?
“ So should I ! ”—cried the King—“ ’t was mere vanity,
“ Not love, set that task to humanity ! ”
Lords and ladies alike turned with loathing
From such a proved wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Not so, I ; for I caught an expression
 In her brow's undisturbed self-possession
 Amid the Court's scoffing and merriment,—
 As if from no pleasing experiment
 She rose, yet of pain not much heedful
 So long as the process was needful,—
 As if she had tried in a crucible,
 To what "speeches like gold" were reducible,
 And, finding the finest prove copper,
 Felt the smoke in her face was but proper ;
 To know what she had *not* to trust to,
 Was worth all the ashes and dust too.
 She went out 'mid hooting and laughter ;
 Clement Marot stayed ; I followed after,
 And asked, as a grace, what it all meant ?
 If she wished not the rash deed's recalment ?
 " For I "—so I spoke—" am a poet :
 " Human nature,—behoves that I know it !"

She told me, " Too long had I heard
 " Of the deed proved alone by the word :
 " For my love—what De Lorge would not dare !
 " With my scorn—what De Lorge could compare !
 " And the endless descriptions of death
 " He would brave when my lip formed a breath,
 " I must reckon as braved, or, of course,
 " Doubt his word—and moreover, perforce,
 " For such gifts as no lady could spurn,
 " Must offer my love in return.

“ When I looked on your lion, it brought
“ All the dangers at once to my thought,
“ Encountered by all sorts of men,
“ Before he was lodged in his den,—
“ From the poor slave whose club or bare hands
“ Dug the trap, set the snare on the sands,
“ With no King and no Court to applaud,
“ By no shame, should he shrink, overawed,
“ Yet to capture the creature made shift,
“ That his rude boys might laugh at the gift,
“ —To the page who last leaped o’er the fence
“ Of the pit, on no greater pretence
“ Than to get back the bonnet he dropped,
“ Lest his pay for a week should be stopped.
“ So, wiser I judged it to make
“ One trial what ‘ death for my sake ’
“ Really meant, while the power was yet mine,
“ Than to wait until time should define
“ Such a phrase not so simply as I,
“ Who took it to mean just ‘ to die.’
“ The blow a glove gives is but weak :
“ Does the mark yet discolour my cheek ?
“ But when the heart suffers a blow,
“ Will the pain pass so soon, do you know ? ”

I looked, as away she was sweeping,
And saw a youth eagerly keeping
As close as he dared to the doorway.
No doubt that a noble should more weigh

His life than befits a plebeian ;
 And yet, had our brute been Nemean—
 (I judge by a certain calm fervour
 The youth stepped with, forward to serve her)
 —He 'd have scarce thought you did him the worst turn
 If you whispered “ Friend, what you'd get, first earn ! ”
 And when, shortly after, she carried
 Her shame from the Court, and they married,
 To that marriage some happiness, maugre
 The voice of the Court, I dared augur.

For De Lorge, he made women with men vie,
 Those in wonder and praise, these in envy ;
 And in short stood so plain a head taller
 That he wooed and won . . . how do you call her ?
 The beauty, that rose in the sequel-
 To the King's love, who loved her a week well.
 And 't was noticed he never would honour
 De Lorge (who looked daggers upon her)
 With the easy commission of stretching
 His legs in the service, and fetching
 His wife, from her chamber, those straying
 Sad gloves she was always mislaying,
 While the King took the closet to chat in,—
 But of course this adventure came pat in.
 And never the King told the story,
 How bringing a glove brought such glory
 But the wife smiled—“ His nerves are grown firmer :
 “ Mine he brings now and utters no murmur.”

Venienti occurrite morbo !

With which moral I drop my theorbo.

TIME'S REVENGES.

I 'VE a Friend, over the sea ;
I like him, but he loves me.
It all grew out of the books I write ;
They find such favour in his sight
That he slaughters you with savage looks
Because you don 't admire my books.
He does himself though,—and if some vein
Were to snap to-night in this heavy brain,
To-morrow month, if I lived to try,
Round should I just turn quietly,
Or out of the bedclothes stretch my hand
Till I found him, come from his foreign land
To be my nurse in this poor place,
And make my broth and wash my face
And light my fire and, all the while,
Bear with his old good-humoured smile
That I told him “ Better have kept away
“ Than come and kill me, night and day,
“ With, worse than fever throbs and shoots,
“ The creaking of his clumsy boots.”
I am as sure that this he would do,
As that Saint Paul's is striking two.
And I think I rather . . . woe is me !

—Yes, rather should see him than not see,
 If lifting a hand would seat him there
 Before me in the empty chair
 To-night, when my head aches indeed,
 And I can neither think nor read
 Nor make these purple fingers hold
 The pen ; this garret 's freezing cold !

And I 've a Lady—there he wakes,
 The laughing fiend and prince of snakes
 Within me, at her name, to pray
 Fate send some creature in the way
 Of my love for her, to be down-torn,
 Upthrust and outward-borne,
 So I might prove myself that sea
 Of passion which I needs must be !
 Call my thoughts false and my fancies quaint
 And my style infirm and its figures faint,
 All the critics say, and more blame yet,
 And not one angry word you get.
 But, please you, wonder I would put
 My cheek beneath that lady's foot
 Rather than trample under mine
 The laurels of the Florentine,
 And you shall see how the devil spends
 A fire God gave for other ends !
 I tell you, I stride up and down
 This garret, crowned with love's best crown,
 And feasted with love's perfect feast,

To think I kill for her, at least,
Body and soul and peace and fame,
Alike youth's end and manhood's aim,
—So is my spirit, as flesh with sin,
Filled full, eaten out and in
With the face of her, the eyes of her,
The lips, the little chin, the stir
Of shadow round her mouth ; and she
—I 'll tell you,—calmly would decree
That I should roast at a slow fire,
If that would compass her desire
And make her one whom they invite
To the famous ball to-morrow night.

There may be heaven ; there must be hell ;
Meantime, there is our earth here—well !

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND.

THAT second time they hunted me
From hill to plain, from shore to sea,
And Austria, hounding far and wide
Her blood-hounds thro' the country-side,
Breathed hot and instant on my trace,—
I made six days a hiding-place
Of that dry green old aqueduct
Where I and Charles, when boys, have plucked
The fire-flies from the roof above,

Bright creeping thro' the moss they love :
 —How long it seems since Charles was lost !
 Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed
 The country in my very sight ;
 And when that peril ceased at night,
 The sky broke out in red dismay
 With signal fires ; well, there I lay
 Close covered o'er in my recess,
 Up to the neck in ferns and cress,
 Thinking on Metternich our friend,
 And Charles's miserable end,
 And much beside, two days ; the third,
 Hunger o'ercame me when I heard
 The peasants from the village go
 To work among the maize ; you know,
 With us in Lombardy, they bring
 Provisions packed on mules, a string
 With little bells that cheer their task,
 And casks, and boughs on every cask
 To keep the sun's heat from the wine ;
 These I let pass in jingling line,
 And, close on them, dear noisy crew,
 The peasants from the village, too ;
 For at the very rear would troop
 Their wives and sisters in a group
 To help, I knew ; when these had passed,
 I threw my glove to strike the last,
 Taking the chance : she did not start,
 Much less cry out, but stooped apart,

One instant rapidly glanced round,
And saw me beckon from the ground :
A wild bush grows and hides my crypt ;
She picked my glove up while she stripped
A branch off, then rejoined the rest
With that ; my glove lay in her breast :
Then I drew breath ; they disappeared :
It was for Italy I feared.

An hour, and she returned alone
Exactly where my glove was thrown.
Meanwhile came many thoughts ; on me
Rested the hopes of Italy ;
I had devised a certain tale
Which, when 't was told her, could not fail
Persuade a peasant of its truth ;
I meant to call a freak of youth
This hiding, and give hopes of pay,
And no temptation to betray.
But when I saw that woman's face,
Its calm simplicity of grace,
Our Italy's own attitude
In which she walked thus far, and stood,
Planting each naked foot so firm,
To crush the snake and spare the worm—
At first sight of her eyes, I said,
“ I am that man upon whose head
“ They fix the price, because I hate
“ The Austrians over us : the State

" Will give you gold—oh, gold so much !—
 " If you betray me to their clutch,
 " And be your death, for aught I know,
 " If once they find you saved their foe.
 " Now, you must bring me food and drink,
 " And also paper, pen and ink,
 " And carry safe what I shall write
 " To Padua, which you 'll reach at night
 " Before the duonio shuts ; go in,
 " And wait till Tenebræ being ;
 " Walk to the third confessional,
 " Between the pillar and the wall,
 " And kneeling whisper, *Whence comes peace ?*
 " Say it a second time, then cease ;
 " And if the voice inside returns,
 " *From Christ and Freedom ; what concerns*
 " *The cause of Peace ?*—for answer, slip
 " My letter where you placed your lip ;
 " Then come back happy we have done
 " Our mother service—I, the son,
 " As you the daughter of our land !"

Three mornings more, she took her stand
 In the same place, with the same eyes :
 I was no surer of sun-rise
 Than of her coming : we conferred
 Of her own prospects, and I heard
 She had a lover—stout and tall,
 She said—then let her eyelids fall,

“ He could do much ”—as if some doubt
Entered her heart,—then, passing out,
“ She could not speak for others, who
“ Had other thoughts ; herself she knew : ”
And so she brought me drink and food.
After four days, the scouts pursued
Another path ; at last arrived
The help my Paduan friends contrived
To furnish me : she brought the news.
For the first time I could not choose
But kiss her hand, and lay my own
Upon her head—“ This faith was shown
“ To Italy, our mother ; she
“ Uses my hand and blesses thee.”
She followed down to the sea-shore ;
I left and never saw her more.

How very long since I have thought
Concerning—much less wished for—aught
Beside the good of Italy,
For which I live and mean to die !
I never was in love ; and since
Charles proved false, what shall now convince
My inmost heart I have a friend ?
However, if I pleased to spend
Real wishes on myself—say, three—
I know at least what one should be.
I would grasp Metternich until
I felt his red wet throat distil

In blood thro' these two hands. And next,
 —Nor much for that am I perplexed—
 Charles, perjured traitor, for his part,
 Should die slow of a broken heart
 Under his new employers. Last
 —Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast
 Do I grow old and out of strength.
 If I resolved to seek at length
 My father's house again, how scared
 They all would look, and unprepared!
 My brothers live in Austria's pay
 —Disowned me long ago, men say,
 And all my early mates who used
 To praise me so—perhaps induced
 More than one early step of mine—
 Are turning wise: while some opine
 "Freedom grows license," some suspect
 "Haste breeds delay," and recollect
 They always said, such premature
 Beginnings never could endure!
 So, with a sullen "All 's for best,"
 The land seems settling to its rest.
 I think then, I should wish to stand
 This evening in that dear, lost land,
 Over the sea the thousand miles,
 And know if yet that woman smiles
 With the calm smile; some little farm
 She lives in there, no doubt: what harm
 If I sat on the door-side bench,

And, while her spindle made a trench
Fantastically in the dust,
Inquired of all her fortunes—just
Her children's ages and their names,
And what may be the husband's aims
For each of them. I 'd talk this out,
And sit there, for an hour about,
Then kiss her hand once more, and lay
Mine on her head, and go my way.

So much for idle wishing—how
It steals the time ! To business now.

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

PIANO DI SORRENTO.

FORTÙ, Fortù, my beloved one,
Sit here by my side,
On my knees put up both little feet !
I was sure, if I tried,
I could make you laugh spite of Scirocco.
Now, open your eyes,
Let me keep you amused till he vanish
In black from the skies,
With telling my memories over
As you tell your beads ;
All the Plain saw me gather, I garland
—The flowers or the weeds.

Time for rain ! for your long hot dry Autumn
 Had net-worked with brown
 The white skin of each grape on the bunches,
 Marked like a quail's crown,
 Those creatures you make such account of,
 Whose heads,—speckled white
 Over brown like a great spider's back,
 As I told you last night,—
 Your mother bites off for her supper.
 Red-ripe as could be,
 Pomegranates were chapping and splitting
 In halves on the tree :
 And betwixt the loose walls of great flintstone,
 Or in the thick dust
 On the path, or straight out of the rock-side,
 Wherever could thrust
 Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower
 Its yellow face up,
 For the prize were great butterflies fighting,
 Some five for one cup.
 So, I guessed, ere I got up this morning,
 What change was in store,
 By the quick rustle-down of the quail-nets
 Which woke me before
 I could open my shutter, made fast
 With a bough and a stone,
 And look thro' the twisted dead vine-twigs,
 Sole lattice that 's known.
 Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net-poles,

While, busy beneath,
Your priest and his brother tugged at them,
The rain in their teeth.
And out upon all the flat house-roofs
Where split figs lay drying,
The girls took the frails under cover :
Nor use seemed in trying
To get out the boats and go fishing,
For, under the cliff,
Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind-rock.
No seeing our skiff
Arrive about noon from Amalfi,
—Our fisher arrive,
And pitch down his basket before us,
All trembling alive
With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit ;
You touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
Of horns and of humps,
Which only the fisher looks grave at,
While round him like imps
Cling screaming the children as naked
And brown as his shrimps ;
Himself too as bare to the middle
—You see round his neck
The string and its brass coin suspended,
That saves him from wreck.
But to-day not a boat reached Salerno,
So back, to a man,

Came our friends, with whose help in the vineyards
 Grape-harvest began.
 In the vat, halfway up in our house-side,
 Like blood the juice spins,
 While your brother all bare-legged is dancing
 Till breathless he grins
 Dead-beaten in effort on effort
 To keep the grapes under,
 Since still when he seems all but master,
 In pours the fresh plunder
 From girls who keep coming and going
 With basket on shoulder,
 And eyes shut against the rain's driving ;
 Your girls that are older,—
 For under the hedges of aloe,
 And where, on its bed
 Of the orchard's black mould, the love-apple
 Lies pulpy and red,
 All the young ones are kneeling and filling
 Their laps with the snails
 Tempted out by this first rainy weather,—
 Your best of regales,
 As to-night will be proved to my sorrow,
 When, supping in state,
 We shall feast our grape-gleaners (two dozen,
 Three over one plate)
 With lasagne so tempting to swallow
 In slippery ropes,
 And gourds fried in great purple slices,

That colour of popes.
Meantime, see the grape bunch they 've brought you :
The rain-water slips
O'er the heavy blue bloom on each globe
Which the wasp to your lips
Still follows with fretful persistence :
Nay, taste, while awake,
This half of a curd-white smooth cheese-ball
That peels, flake by flake,
Like an onion, each smoother and whiter ;
Next, sip this weak wine
From the thin green glass flask, with its stopper,
A leaf of the vine ;
And end with the prickly-pear's red flesh
That leaves thro' its juice
The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth.
Scirocco is loose !
Hark, the quick, whistling pelt of the olives
Which, thick in one's track,
Tempt the stranger to pick up and bite them,
Tho' not yet half black !
How the old twisted olive trunks shudder,
The medlars let fall
Their hard fruit, and the brittle great fig-trees
Snap off, figs and all,
For here comes the whole of the tempest !
No refuge, but creep
Back again to my side and my shoulder,
And listen or sleep.

O how will your country show next week,
 When all the vine-boughs
 Have been stripped of their foliage to pasture
 The mules and the cows?
 Last eve, I rode over the mountains;
 Your brother, my guide,
 Soon left me, to feast on the myrtles
 That offered, each side,
 Their fruit-balls, black, glossy and luscious,—
 Or strip from the sorbs
 A treasure, or, rosy and wondrous,
 Those hairy gold orbs!
 But my mule picked his sure sober path out,
 Just stopping to neigh
 When he recognized down in the valley
 His mates on their way
 With the faggots and barrels of water;
 And soon we emerged
 From the plain, where the woods could scarce follow;
 And still as we urged
 Our way, the woods wondered, and left us,
 As up still we trudged
 Though the wild path grew wilder each instant,
 And place was e'en grudged
 'Mid the rock-chasms and piles of loose stones
 Like the loose broken teeth
 Of some monster which climbed there to die
 From the ocean beneath—
 Place was grudged to the silver-grey fume-weed

That clung to the path,
And dark rosemary ever a-dying
That, 'spite the wind's wrath,
So loves the salt rock's face to seaward,
And lentisks as staunch
To the stone where they root and bear berries,
And . . . what shows a branch
Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets
Of pale seagreen leaves ;
Over all trod my mule with the caution
Of gleaners o'er sheaves,
Still, foot after foot like a lady :
So, round after round,
He climbed to the top of Calvano,
And God's own profound
Was above me, and round me the mountains,
And under, the sea,
And within me my heart to bear witness
What was and shall be.
Oh, heaven and the terrible crystal !
No rampart excludes
Your eye from the life to be lived
In the blue solitudes.
Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement !
• Still moving with you ;
For, ever some new head and breast of them
Thrusts into view
To observe the intruder ; you see it
If quickly you turn

And, before they escape you, surprise them
 They grudge you should learn
 How the soft plains they look on, lean over
 And love (they pretend)
 —Cower beneath them, the flat sea-pine crouches,
 The wild fruit-trees bend,
 E'en the myrtle-leaves curl, shrink and shut :
 All is silent and grave :
 'T is a sensual and timorous beauty,
 How fair ! but a slave.
 So, I turned to the sea ; and there slumbered
 As greenly as ever
 Those isles of the siren, your Galli ;
 No ages can sever
 The Three, nor enable their sister
 To join them,—halfway
 On the voyage, she looked at Ulysses—
 No farther to-day,
 Tho' the small one, just launched in the wave,
 Watches breast-high and steady
 From under the rock, her bold sister
 Swum halfway already.
 Fortù, shall we sail there together
 And see from the sides
 Quite new rocks show their faces, new haunts
 Where the siren abides ?
 Shall we sail round and round them, close over
 The rocks, tho' unseen,
 That ruffle the grey glassy water

To glorious green ?
Then scramble from splinter to splinter,
Reach land and explore,
On the largest, the strange square black turret
With never a door,
Just a loop to admit the quick lizards ;
Then, stand there and hear
The birds' quiet singing, that tells us
What life is, so clear ?
—The secret they sang to Ulysses
When, ages ago,
He heard and he knew this life's secret
I hear and I know.

Ah, see ! The sun breaks o'er Calvano ;
He strikes the great gloom
And flutters it o'er the mount's summit
In airy gold fume.
All is over. Look out, see the gipsy,
Our tinker and smith,
Has arrived, set up bellows and forge,
And down-squatted forthwith
To his hammering, under the wall there ;
One eye keeps aloof
The urchins that itch to be putting
His jews'-harps to proof,
While the other, thro' locks of curled wire,
Is watching how sleek
Shines the hog, come to share in the windfall

—An abbot's own cheek.
 All is over. Wake up and come out now,
 And down let us go,
 And see the fine things got in order
 At church for the show
 Of the Sacrament, set forth this evening ;
 To-morrow 's the Feast
 Of the Rosary's Virgin, by no means
 Of Virgins the least,
 As you 'll hear in the off-hand discourse
 Which (all nature, no art)
 The Dominican brother, these three weeks,
 Was getting by heart.
 Not a pillar nor post but is dizen'd
 With red and blue papers ;
 All the roof waves with ribbons, each altar
 A-blaze with long tapers ;
 But the great masterpiece is the scaffold
 Rigged glorious to hold
 All the fiddlers and fifers and drummers
 And trumpeters bold,
 Not afraid of Bellini nor Auber,
 Who, when the priest 's hoarse,
 Will strike us up something that 's brisk
 For the feast's second course.
 And then will the flaxen-wigged Image
 Be carried in pomp
 Thro' the plain, while in gallant procession
 The priests mean to stomp.

All round the glad church lie old bottles
With gunpowder stopped,
Which will be, when the Image re-enters,
Religiously popped ;
And at night from the crest of Calvano
Great bonfires will hang,
On the plain will the trumpets join chorus,
And more poppers bang.
At all events, come—to the garden
As far as the wall ;
See me tap with a hoe on the plaster
Till out there shall fall
A scorpion with wide angry nippers !

—“ Such trifles ! ” you say ?
Fortù, in my England at home,
Men meet gravely to-day
And debate, if abolishing Corn-laws
Be righteous and wise
—If ’t were proper, Scirocco should vanish
In black from the skies !

IN A GONDOLA.

He sings.

I SEND my heart up to thee, all my heart
In this my singing.

For the stars help me, and the sea bears part ;
 The very night is clinging
 Closer to Venice' streets to leave one space
 Above me, whence thy face
 May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling-place.

She speaks.

Say after me, and try to say
 My very words, as if each word
 Came from you of your own accord,
 In your own voice, in your own way :
 " This woman's heart and soul and brain
 " Are mine as much as this gold chain
 " She bids me wear ; which " (say again)
 " I choose to make by cherishing
 " A precious thing, or choose to fling
 " Over the boat-side, ring by ring."
 And yet once more say . . . no word more !
 Since words are only words. Give o'er !

Unless you call me, all the same,
 Familiarly by my pet name,
 Which if the Three should hear you call,
 And me reply to, would proclaim
 At once our secret to them all.
 Ask of me, too, command me, blame—
 Do, break down the partition-wall
 'Twixt us, the daylight world beholds
 Curtained in dusk and splendid folds !

What 's left but—all of me to take ?
I am the Three's : prevent them, slake
Your thirst ! 'T is said, the Arab sage
In practising with gems can loose
Their subtle spirit in his cruce
And leave but ashes : so, sweet mage,
Leave them my ashes when thy use
Sucks out my soul, thy heritage !

He sings.

I.

Past we glide, and past, and past !
What 's that poor Agnese doing
Where they make the shutters fast ?
Grey Zanobi's just a-wooing
To his couch the purchased bride :
Past we glide !

II.

Past we glide, and past, and past !
Why 's the Pucci Palace flaring
Like a beacon to the blast ?
Guests by hundreds, not one caring
If the dear host's neck were wried :
Past we glide !

She sings.

I.

The moth's kiss, first !
Kiss me as if you made believe
You were not sure, this eve,
How my face, your flower, had pursed

Its petals up ; so, here and there
 You brush it, till I grow aware
 Who wants me, and wide ope I burst.

II.

The bee's kiss, now !
 Kiss me as if you entered gay
 My heart at some noonday,
 A bud that dares not disallow
 The claim, so all is rendered up,
 And passively its shattered cup
 Over your head to sleep I bow.

He sings.

I.

What are we two ?
 I am a Jew,
 And carry thee, farther than friends can pursue,
 To a feast of our tribe ;
 Where they need thee to bribe
 The devil that blasts them unless he imbibe
 Thy . . . Scatter the vision for ever ! And now,
 As of old, I am I, thou art thou !

II.

Say again, what we are ?
 The sprite of a star,
 I lure thee above where the destinies bar
 My plumes their full play
 Till a ruddier ray
 Than my pale one announce there is withering away

Some . . . Scatter the vision for ever ! And now
As of old, I am I, thou art thou !

He muses.

Oh, which were best, to roam or rest ?
The land's lap or the water's breast ?
To sleep on yellow millet-sheaves,
Or swim in lucid shallows just
Eluding water-lily leaves,
An inch from Death's black fingers, thrust
To lock you, whom release he must ;
Which life were best on Summer eves ?

He speaks, musing.

Lie back ; could thought of mine improve you ?
From this shoulder let there spring
A wing ; from this, another wing ;
Wings, not legs and feet, shall move you !
Snow-white must they spring, to blend
With your flesh, but I intend
They shall deepen to the end,
Broader, into burning gold,
Till both wings crescent-wise enfold
Your perfect self, from 'neath your feet
To o'er your head, where, lo, they meet
As if a million sword-blades hurled
Defiance from you to the world !

Rescue me thou, the only real !
And scare away this mad ideal

That came, nor motions to depart !
Thanks ! Now, stay ever as thou art !

Still he muses.

I.

What if the Three should catch at last
Thy serenader ? While there 's cast
Paul's cloak about my head, and fast
Gian pinions me, Himself has past
His stylet thro' my back ; I reel ;
And . . . is it thou I feel ?

II.

They trail me, these three godless knaves,
Past every church that saints and saves,
Nor stop till, where the cold sea raves
By Lido's wet accursed graves,
They scoop mine, roll me to its brink,
And . . . on thy breast I sink !

She replies, musing.

Dip your arm o'er the boat-side, elbow-deep,
As I do : thus : were death so unlike sleep,
Caught this way ? Death 's to fear from flame or steel,
Or poison doubtless ; but from water—feel !

Go find the bottom ! Would you stay me ? There !
Now pluck a great blade of that ribbon-grass
To plait in where the foolish jewel was,
I flung away : since you have praised my hair,
'T is proper to be choice in what I wear.

He speaks.

Row home? must we row home? Too surely
Know I where its front 's demurely
Over the Giudecca piled ;
Window just with window mating,
Door on door exactly waiting,
All 's the set face of a child :
But behind it, where 's a trace
Of the staidness and reserve,
And formal lines without a curve,
In the same child's playing-face?
No two windows look one way
O'er the small sea-water thread
Below them. Ah, the autumn day
I, passing, saw you overhead !
First, out a cloud of curtain blew,
Then a sweet cry, and last came you—
To catch your lory that must needs
Escape just then, of all times then,
To peck a tall plant's fleecy seeds,
And make me happiest of men.
I scarce could breathe to see you reach
So far back o'er the balcony
To catch him ere he climbed too high
Above you in the Smyrna peach
That quick the round smooth cord of gold,
This coiled hair on your head, unrolled,
Fell down you like a gorgeous snake
The Roman girls were wont, of old,

When Rome there was, for coolness' sake
 To let lie curling o'er their bosoms.
 Dear lory, may his beak retain
 Ever its delicate rose stain
 As if the wounded lotus-blossoms
 Had marked their thief to know again !

Stay longer yet, for others' sake
 Than mine ! What should your chamber do ?
 —With all its rarities that ache
 In silence while day lasts, but wake
 At night-time and their life renew,
 Suspended just to pleasure you
 Who brought against their will together
 These objects, and, while day lasts, weave
 Around them such a magic tether
 That dumb they look : your harp, believe,
 With all the sensitive tight strings
 Which dare not speak, now to itself
 Breathes slumberously, as if some elf
 Went in and out the chords, his wings
 Make murmur wheresoe'er they graze,
 As an angel may, between the maze
 Of midnight palace-pillars, on
 And on, to sow God's plagues, have gone
 Through guilty glorious Babylon.
 And while such murmurs flow, the nymph
 Bends o'er the harp-top from her shell
 As the dry limpet for the lymph

Come with a tune he knows so well.
And how your statues' hearts must swell !
And how your pictures must descend
To see each other, friend with friend !
Oh, could you take them by surprise,
You 'd find Schidone's eager Duke
Doing the quaintest courtesies
To that prim saint by Haste-thee-Luke !
And, deeper into her rock den,
Bold Castelfranco's Magdalen
You 'd find retreated from the ken
Of that robed counsel-keeping Ser—
As if the Tizian thinks of her,
And is not, rather, gravely bent
On seeing for himself what toys
Are these, his progeny invent,
What litter now the board employs
Whereon he signed a document
That got him murdered ! Each enjoys
Its night so well, you cannot break
The sport up, so, indeed must make
More stay with me, for others' sake.

She speaks.

I.

To-morrow, if a harp-string, say,
Is used to tie the jasmine back
That overflows my room with sweets,
Contrive your Zorzi somehow meets

Zanze ! If the ribbon 's black,
The Three are watching : keep away !

II.

Your gondola—let Zorzi wreath
A mesh of water-weeds about
Its prow, as if he unaware
Had struck some quay or bridge-foot stair !
That I may throw a paper out
As you and he go underneath.

There 's Zanze's vigilant taper ; safe are we.
Only one minute more to-night with me ?
Resume your past self of a month ago !
Be you the bashful gallant, I will be
The lady with the colder breast than snow.
Now bow you, as becomes, nor touch my hand
More than I touch yours when I step to land,
And say, " All thanks, Siora !"—

Heart to heart

And lips to lips ! Yet once more, ere we part,
Clasp me and make me thine, as mine thou art !

He is surprised, and stabbed.

It was ordained to be so, sweet !—and best
Comes now, beneath thine eyes, upon thy breast.
Still kiss me ! Care not for the cowards ! Care
Only to put aside thy beauteous hair
My blood will hurt ! The Three, I do not scorn
To death, because they never lived : but I
Have lived indeed, and so—(yet one more kiss)—can die !

WARING.

I.

1.

WHAT 's become of Waring
Since he gave us all the slip,
Chose land-travel or seafaring,
Boots and chest or staff and scrip,
Rather than pace up and down
Any longer London town ?

II.

Who 'd have guessed it from his lip
Or his brow's accustomed bearing,
On the night he thus took ship
Or started landward ?—little caring
For us, it seems, who supped together
(Friends of his too, I remember)
And walked home thro' the merry weather,
The snowiest in all December.
I left his arm that night myself
For what's-his-name's, the new prose-poet
Who wrote the book there, on the shelf—
How, forsooth, was I to know it
If Waring meant to glide away
Like a ghost at break of day ?
Never looked he half so gay !

III.

He was prouder than the devil :
 How he must have cursed our revel !
 Ay and many other meetings,
 Indoor visits, outdoor greetings,
 As up and down he paced this London,
 With no work done, but great works undone,
 Where scarce twenty knew his name.
 Why not, then, have earlier spoken,
 Written, bustled ? Who 's to blame
 If your silence kept unbroken ?
 " True, but there were sundry jottings,
 " Stray-leaves, fragments, blurs and blottings,
 " Certain first steps were achieved
 " Already which "—(is that your meaning ?)
 " Had well borne out whoe'er believed
 " In more to come ! " But who goes gleaning
 Hedge-side chance-blades, while full-sheaved
 Stand cornfields by him ? Pride, o'erweening
 Pride alone, puts forth such claims
 O'er the day's distinguished names.

IV.

Meantime, how much I loved him,
 I find out now I 've lost him.
 I who cared not if I moved him,
 Who could so carelessly accost him,
 Henceforth never shall get free
 Of his ghostly company,

His eyes that just a little wink
As deep I go into the merit
Of this and that distinguished spirit—
His cheeks' raised colour, soon to sink,
As long I dwell on some stupendous
And tremendous (Heaven defend us !)
Monstr'-inform'-ingens-horrend-ous
Demoniaco-seraphic
Penman's latest piece of graphic.
Nay, my very wrist grows warm
With his dragging weight of arm.
E'en so, swimmingly appears,
Through one's after-supper musings,
Some lost lady of old years
With her beauteous vain endeavour
And goodness unrepaid as ever ;
The face, accustomed to refusings,
We, puppies that we were . . . Oh never
Surely, nice of conscience, scrupled
Being aught like false, forsooth, to ?
Telling aught but honest truth to ?
What a sin, had we centupled
Its possessor's grace and sweetness !
No ! she heard in its completeness
Truth, for truth 's a weighty matter,
And truth, at issue, we can't flatter !
Well, 't is done with ; she 's exempt
From damning us thro' such a sally ;
And so she glides, as down a valley,
Taking up with her contempt,

Past our reach ; and in, the flowers
Shut her unregarded hours.

V.

Oh, could I have him back once more,
This Waring, but one half-day more !
Back, with the quiet face of yore,
So hungry for acknowledgment
Like mine ! I 'd fool him to his bent.
Feed, should not he, to heart's content ?
I 'd say, " to only have conceived,
" Planned your great works, apart from progress,
" Surpasses little works achieved !"
I 'd lie so, I should be believed.
I 'd make such havoc of the claims
Of the day's distinguished names
To feast him with, as feasts an ogress
Her feverish sharp-toothed gold-crowned child !
Or as one feasts a creature rarely
Captured here, unreconciled
To capture ; and completely gives
Its pettish humours license, barely
Requiring that it lives.

VI.

Ichabod, Ichabod,
The glory is departed !
Travels Waring East away ?
Who, of knowledge, by hearsay,
Reports a man upstated

Somewhere as a god,
Hordes grown European-hearted,
Millions of the wild made tame
On a sudden at his fame?
In Vishnu-land what Avatar?
Or who in Moscow, toward the Czar,
With the demurest of footfalls
Over the Kremlin's pavement bright
With serpentine and syenite,
Steps, with five other Generals
That simultaneously take snuff,
For each to have pretext enough
And kerchiefwise unfold his sash
Which, softness' self, is yet the stuff
To hold fast where a steel chain snaps,
And leave the grand white neck no gash?
Waring in Moscow, to those rough
Cold northern natures born perhaps,
Like the lambwhite maiden dear
From the circle of mute kings
Unable to repress the tear,
Each as his sceptre down he flings,
To Dian's fane at Taurica,
Where now a captive priestess, she alway
Mingles her tender grave Hellenic speech
With theirs, tuned to the hailstone-beaten beach
As pours some pigeon, from the myrrhy lands
Rapt by the whirlblast to fierce Scythian strands
Where breed the swallows, her melodious cry

Amid their barbarous twitter !
 In Russia ? Never ! Spain were fitter !
 Ay, most likely 't is in Spain
 That we and Waring meet again
 Now, while he turns down that cool narrow lane
 Into the blackness, out of grave Madrid
 All fire and shine, abrupt as when there 's slid
 Its stiff gold blazing pall
 From some black coffin-lid.
 Or, best of all,
 I love to think
 The leaving us was just a feint ;
 Back here to London did he slink,
 And now works on without a wink
 Of sleep, and we are on the brink
 Of something great in fresco-paint :
 Some garret's ceiling, walls and floor,
 Up and down and o'er and o'er
 He splashes, as none splashed before
 Since great Caldara Polidore.
 Or Music means this land of ours
 Some favour yet, to pity won
 By Purcell from his Rosy Bowers,—
 " Give me my so-long promised son,
 " Let Waring end what I begun !"
 Then down he creeps and out he steals
 Only when the night conceals
 His face ; in Kent 't is cherry-time,
 Or hops are picking : or at prime

Of March he wanders as, too happy,
Years ago when he was young,
Some mild eve when woods grew sappy
And the early moths had sprung
To life from many a trembling sheath
Woven the warm boughs beneath ;
While small birds said to themselves
What should soon be actual song,
And young gnats, by tens and twelves,
Made as if they were the throng
That crowd around and carry aloft
The sound they have nursed, so sweet and pure,
Out of a myriad noises soft,
Into a tone that can endure
Amid the noise of a July noon
When all God's creatures crave their boon,
All at once and all in tune,
And get it, happy as Waring then.
Having first within his ken
What a man might do with men :
And far too glad, in the even-glow,
To mix with the world he meant to take
Into his hand, he told you, so—
And out of it his world to make,
To contract and to expand
As he shut or oped his hand.
Oh Waring, what 's to really be ?
A clear stage and a crowd to see !
Some Garrick, say, out shall not he

The heart of Hamlet's mystery pluck ?
 Or, where most unclean beasts are rife,
 Some Junius—am I right?—shall tuck
 His sleeve, and forth with flaying-knife !
 Some Chatterton shall have the luck
 Of calling Rowley into life !
 Some one shall somehow run a muck
 With this old world for want of strife
 Sound asleep. Contrive, contrive
 To rouse us, Waring ! Who 's alive ?
 Our men scarce seem in earnest now.
 Distinguished names !—but 't is, somehow,
 As if they played at being names
 Still more distinguished, like the games
 Of children. Turn our sport to earnest
 With a visage of the sternest !
 Bring the real times back, confessed
 Still better than our very best !

II.

I.

“ WHEN I last saw Waring . . .”
 (How all turned to him who spoke !
 You saw Waring ? Truth or joke ?
 In land-travel or sea-faring ?)

II.

“ We were sailing by Triest
 “ Where a day or two we harboured :

“ A sunset was in the West,
“ When, looking over the vessel’s side,
“ One of our company espied
“ A sudden speck to larboard.
“ And as a sea-duck flies and swims
“ At once, so came the light craft up,
“ With its sole lateen sail that trims
“ And turns (the water round its rims
“ Dancing, as round a sinking cup)
“ And by us like a fish it curled,
“ And drew itself up close beside,
“ Its great sail on the instant furled,
“ And o’er its thwarts a shrill voice cried,
“ (A neck as bronzed as a Lascar’s)
“ ‘ Buy wine of us, you English Brig ?
“ ‘ Or fruit, tobacco and cigars ?
“ ‘ A pilot for you to Triest ?
“ ‘ Without one, look you ne’er so big,
“ ‘ They ’ll never let you up the bay !
“ ‘ We natives should know best.’
“ I turned, and ‘ just those fellows’ way,’
“ Our captain said, ‘ The ’long-shore thieves
“ ‘ Are laughing at us in their sleeves.’

III.

“ In truth, the boy leaned laughing back ;
“ And one, half-hidden by his side
“ Under the furled sail, soon I spied,
“ With great grass hat and kerchief black

" Who looked up with his kingly throat
 " Said somewhat, while the other shook
 " His hair back from his eyes to look
 " Their longest at us ; then the boat,
 " I know not how, turned sharply round,
 " Laying her whole side on the sea
 " As a leaping fish does ; from the lee
 " Into the weather, cut somehow
 " Her sparkling path beneath our bow
 " And so went off, as with a bound,
 " Into the rosy and golden half
 " O' the sky, to overtake the sun
 " And reach the shore, like the sea-calf
 " Its singing cave ; yet I caught one
 " Glance ere away the boat quite passed,
 " And neither time nor toil could mar
 " Those features : so I saw the last
 " Of Waring !"—You ? Oh, never star
 Was lost here but it rose afar !
 Look East, where whole new thousands are !
 In Vishnu-land what Avatar ?

THE TWINS.

“Give” and “It-shall-be-given-unto-you.”

I.

GRAND rough old Martin Luther
Bloomed fables—flowers on furze,
The better the uncouth :
Do roses stick like burrs ?

II.

A beggar asked an alms
One day at an abbey-door,
Said Luther ; but, seized with qualms,
The abbot replied, “ We ’re poor !

III.

“ Poor, who had plenty once,
“ When gifts fell thick as rain :
“ But they give us nought, for the nonce,
“ And how should we give again ?”

IV.

Then the beggar, “ See your sins !
“ Of old, unless I err,
“ Ye had brothers for inmates, twins,
“ Date and Dabitur.

V.

“ While Date was in good case
 “ Dabitur flourished too :
 “ For Dabitur’s lenten face
 “ No wonder if Date rue.

VI.

“ Would ye retrieve the one ?
 “ Try and make plump the other !
 “ When Date’s penance is done,
 “ Dabitur helps his brother.

VII.

“ Only, beware relapse ! ”
 The Abbot hung his head.
 This beggar might be perhaps
 An angel, Luther said.

A LIGHT WOMAN.

I.

So far as our story approaches the end,
 Which do you pity the most of us three ?—
 My friend, or the mistress of my friend
 With her wanton eyes, or me ?

II.

My friend was already too good to lose,
And seemed in the way of improvement yet,
When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose
And over him drew her net.

III.

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
A shame, said I, if she adds just him
To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
The hundredth for a whim !

IV.

And before my friend be wholly hers,
How easy to prove to him, I said,
An eagle 's the game her pride prefers,
Though she snaps at a wren instead !

V.

So, I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
My hand sought hers as in earnest need,
And round she turned for my noble sake,
And gave me herself indeed.

VI.

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world
The wren is he, with his maiden face.
—You look away and your lip is curled ?
Patience, a moment's space !

VII.

For see, my friend goes shaking and white ;
 He eyes me as the basilisk :
 I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
 Eclipsing his sun's disk.

VIII.

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief :
 " Though I love her—that, he comprehends—
 " One should master one's passions, (love, in chief)
 " And be loyal to one's friends ! "

IX.

And she,—she lies in my hand as tame
 As a pear late basking over a wall ;
 Just a touch to try and off it came ;
 'T is mine,—can I let it fall ?

X.

With no mind to eat it, that 's the worst !
 Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist ?
 'T was quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst
 When I gave its stalk a twist.

XI.

And I,—what I seem to my friend, you see ;
 What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess :
 What I seem to myself, do you ask of me ?
 No hero, I confess.

XII.

"T is an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own :
Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone !

XIII.

One likes to show the truth for the truth ;
That the woman was light is very true :
But suppose she says,—Never mind that youth !
What wrong have I done to you ?

XIV.

Well, any how, here the story stays,
So far at least as I understand ;
And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
Here 's a subject made to your hand !

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER.

I.

I SAID—Then, dearest, since 't is so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
Since this was written and needs must be—

My whole heart rises up to bless
 Your name in pride and thankfulness !
 Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
 Only a memory of the same,
 —And this beside, if you will not blame,
 Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II.

My mistress bent that brow of hers ;
 Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
 When pity would be softening through,
 Fixed me a breathing-while or two
 With life or death in the balance : right !
 The blood replenished me again ;
 My last thought was at least not vain :
 I and my mistress, side by side
 Shall be together, breathe and ride,
 So, one day more am I deified.
 Who knows but the world may end to-night ?

III.

Hush ! if you saw some western cloud
 All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
 By many benedictions—sun's
 And moon's and evening-star's at once—
 And so, you, looking and loving best,
 Conscious grew, your passion drew
 Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,

Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here !—
Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear !
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV.

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.

What need to strive with a life awry ?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me ? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell !
Where had I been now if the worst befell ?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds ?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds ?
We rode ; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,—All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past !
I hoped she would love me ; here we ride.

VI.

What hand and brain went ever paired ?
 What heart alike conceived and dared ?
 What act proved all its thought had been ?
 What will but felt the fleshy screen ?

We ride and I see her bosom heave.
 There 's many a crown for who can reach.
 Ten lines, a statesman's life in each !
 The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
 A soldier's doing ! what atones ?
 They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
 My riding is better, by their leave.

VII.

What does it all mean, poet ? Well,
 Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
 What we felt only ; you expressed
 You hold things beautiful the best,
 And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
 'T is something, nay 't is much : but then,
 Have you yourself what 's best for men ?
 Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
 Nearer one whit your own sublime
 Than we who never have turned a rhyme ?
 Sing, riding 's a joy ! For me I ride.

VIII.

And you, great sculptor—so, you gave
 A score of years to Art, her slave,

And that 's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn !

You acquiesce, and shall I repine ?
What, man of music, you grown grey
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
“ Greatly his opera's strains intend,
“ But in music we know how fashions end ! ”
I gave my youth ; but we ride, in fine.

IX.

Who knows what 's fit for us ? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being—had I signed the bond—
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such ? Try and test !
I sink back shuddering from the quest.
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best ?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X.

And yet—she has not spoke so long !
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide ?

What if we still ride on, we two,
 With life for ever old yet new,
 Changed not in kind but in degree,
 The instant made eternity,—
 And heaven just prove that I and she
 Ride, ride together, for ever ride ?

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN ;
 A CHILD'S STORY.

(WRITTEN FOR, AND INSCRIBED TO, W. M. THE YOUNGER.)

I.

HAMELIN Town 's in Brunswick,
 By famous Hanover city ;
 The river Weser, deep and wide,
 Washes its wall on the southern side ;
 A pleasanter spot you never spied ;
 But, when begins my ditty,
 Almost five hundred years ago,
 To see the townsfolk suffer so
 From vermin, was a pity.

II.

Rats !
 They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
 And bit the babies in the cradles,

And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats,
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

III.

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking :
“ 'T is clear,” cried they, “ our Mayor 's a noddy ;
“ And as for our Corporation—shocking
“ To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
“ For dolts that can't or won't determine
“ What 's best to rid us of our vermin !
“ You hope, because you 're old and obese,
“ To find in the furry civic robe ease ?
“ Rouse up, sirs ! Give your brains a racking
“ To find the remedy we 're lacking,
“ Or, sure as fate, we 'll send you packing ! ”
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

IV.

An hour they sat in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence :
“ For a guilder I 'd my ermine gown sell,
“ I wish I were a mile hence !

“ It ’s easy to bid one rack one’s brain—

“ I ’m sure my poor head aches again,

“ I ’ve scratched it so, and all in vain.

“ Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap ! ”

Just as he said this, what should hap

At the chamber door but a gentle tap ?

“ Bless us,” cried the Mayor, “ what ’s that ? ”

(With the Corporation as he sat,

Looking little though wondrous fat ;

Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister

Than a too-long-opened oyster,

Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous

For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)

“ Only a scraping of shoes on the mat ?

“ Anything like the sound of a rat

“ Makes my heart go pit-a-pat ! ”

v.

“ Come in ! ”—the Mayor cried, looking bigger :

And in did come the strangest figure !

His queer long coat from heel to head

Was half of yellow and half of red,

And he himself was tall and thin,

With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,

And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin

No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,

But lips where smiles went out and in ,

There was no guessing his kith and kin :

And nobody could enough admire
The fall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one : " It 's as my great-grandsire,
" Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
" Had walked this way from his painted tomb-stone ! "

VI.

He advanced to the council-table :
And, " Please your honours," said he, " I 'm able.
" By means of a secret charm, to draw
" All creatures living beneath the sun,
" That creep or swim or fly or run,
" After me so as you never saw !
" And I chiefly use my charm
" On creatures that do people harm,
" The mole and toad and newt and viper ;
" And people call me the Pied Piper."
(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same cheque ;
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe ;
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
" Yet," said he, " poor piper as I am,
" In Tartary I freed the Cham,
" Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats ;

" I cased in Asia the Nizam
 " Of a monstrous brood of vampyre-bats :
 " And as for what your brain bewilders,
 " If I can rid your town of rats
 " Will you give me a thousand guilders ? "
 " One ? fifty thousand ! "—was the exclamation
 Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

VII.

Into the street the Piper stept,
 Smiling first a little smile,
 As if he knew what magic slept
 In his quiet pipe the while ;
 Then, like a musical adept,
 To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
 And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
 Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled ;
 And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
 You heard as if an army muttered ;
 And the muttering grew to a grumbling ;
 And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling ,
 And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
 Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
 Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
 Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
 Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
 Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
 Families by tens and dozens,

Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser
Wherein all plunged and perished !
—Save one who, stout as Julius Cæsar,
Swam across and lived to carry
(As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary :
Which was, “ At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
“ I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
“ And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
“ Into a cider-press’s gripe :
“ And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
“ And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
“ And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
“ And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks :
“ And it seemed as if a voice
“ (Sweeter far than bý harp or bý psaltery
“ Is breathed) called out, ‘ Oh rats, rejoice !
“ ‘ The world is grown to one vast drysaltery !
“ ‘ So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
“ ‘ Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon !’
“ And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
“ All ready staved, like a great sun shone
“ Glorious scarce an inch before me,
“ Just as methought it said, ‘ Come, bore me !’
“ —I found the Weser rolling o’er me.”

VIII.

You should have heard the Hamelin people
 Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
 "Go," cried the Mayor, "and get long poles,
 "Poke out the nests and block up the holes !
 "Consult with carpenters and builders,
 "And leave in our town not even a trace
 "Of the rats !"—when suddenly, up the face
 Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
 With a, "First, if you please, my thousand guilders !"

IX.

A thousand guilders ! The Mayor looked blue ;
 So did the Corporation too.
 For council dinners made rare havoc
 With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock ;
 And half the money would replenish
 Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
 To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
 With a gipsy coat of red and yellow !
 "Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
 "Our business was done at the river's brink ;
 "We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
 "And what 's dead can 't come to life, I think.
 "So, friend, we 're not the folks to shrink
 "From the duty of giving you something for drink,
 "And a matter of money to put in your poke ;
 "But as for the guilders, what we spoke
 "Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.

" Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.

" A thousand guilders ! Come, take fifty ! "

X.

The Piper's face fell, and he cried

" No trifling ! I can't wait, beside !

" I 've promised to visit by dinnertime

" Bagdat, and accept the prime

" Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he 's rich in,

" For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,

" Of a nest of scorpions no survivor :

" With him I proved no bargain-driver,

" With you, don 't think I 'll bate a stiver !

" And folks who put me in a passion

" May find me pipe after another fashion."

XI.

" How ? " cried the Mayor, " d' ye think I brook

" Being worse treated than a Cook ?

" Insulted by a lazy ribald

" With idle pipe and vesture piebald ?

" You threaten us, fellow ? Do your worst,

" Blow your pipe there till you burst ! "

XII.

Once more he stept into the street,

And to his lips again

Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane ;

And ere he blew three notes (such sweet

Soft notes as yet musician's cunning

Never gave the enraptured air)

There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,
Out came the children running.

All the little boys and girls,

With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,

And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,

Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after

The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

XIII.

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood

As if they were changed into blocks of wood,

Unable to move a step, or cry

To the children merrily skipping by,

—Could only follow with the eye

That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.

But how the Mayor was on the rack,

And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,

As the Piper turned from the High Street

To where the Weser rolled its waters

Right in the way of their sons and daughters !

However he turned from South to West,

And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,

And after him the children pressed ;

Great was the joy in every breast.

“ He never can cross that mighty top !

“ He ’s forced to let the piping drop,

“ And we shall see our children stop ! ”

When, lo, as they reached the mountain-side,

A wondrous portal opened wide,

As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed ;

And the Piper advanced and the children followed,

And when all were in to the very last,

The door in the mountain-side shut fast.

Did I say, all ? No ! One was lame,

And could not dance the whole of the way ;

And in after years, if you would blame

His sadness, he was used to say,—

“ It ’s dull in our town since my playmates left !

“ I can’t forget that I ’m bereft

“ Of all the pleasant sights they see,

“ Which the Piper also promised me.

“ For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,

“ Joining the town and just at hand,

“ Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,

“ And flowers put forth a fairer hue,

“ And everything was strange and new ;

“ The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,

“ And their dogs outran our fallow deer,

“ And honey-bees had lost their stings,

“ And horses were born with eagles’ wings :

“ And just as I became assured

“ My lame foot would be speedily cured,

“ The music stopped and I stood still,
 “ And found myself outside the hill,
 “ Left alone against my will,
 “ To go now limping as before,
 “ And never hear of that country more !”

XIV.

Alas, alas for Hamelin !

There came into many a burgher's pate
 A text which says that heaven's gate
 Opes to the rich at as easy rate
 As the needle's eye takes a camel in !
 The mayor sent East, West, North and South,
 To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,
 Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
 Silver and gold to his heart's content,
 If he 'd only return the way he went,
 And bring the children behind him.
 But when they saw 't was a lost endeavour,
 And Piper and dancers were gone for ever
 They made a decree that lawyers never
 Should think their records dated duly
 If, after the day of the month and year,
 These words did not as well appear,
 “ And so long after what happened here
 “ On the 'Twenty-second of July,
 “ Thirteen hundred and seventy-six : ”
 And the better in memory to fix
 The place of the children's last retreat,

They called it, the Pied Piper's Street—
Where any one playing on pipe or tabor
Was sure for the future to lose his labour.
Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern

To shock with mirth a street so solemn ;
But opposite the place of the cavern

They wrote the story on a column,
And on the great church-window painted
The same, to make the world acquainted
How their children were stolen away,
And there it stands to this very day.

And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there 's a tribe
Of alien people that ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they do n't understand.

xv.

So, Willy, let me and you be wipers
Of scores out with all men—especially pipers !
And, whether they pipe us free fróm rats or fróm mice,
If we 've promised them aught, let us keep our promise!

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS.

I.

YOU 'RE my friend :
 I was the man the Duke spoke to ;
 I helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke, too ,
 So, here 's the tale from beginning to end,
 My friend !

II.

Ours is a great wild country :
 If you climb to our castle's top,
 I do n't see where your eye can stop ;
 For when you 've passed the corn-field country,
 Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed,
 And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,
 And cattle-tract to open-chase,
 And open-chase to the very base
 Of the mountain where, at a funeral pace,
 Round about, solemn and slow,
 One by one, row after row,
 Up and up the pine-trees go,
 So, like black priests up, and so
 Down the other side again
 To another greater, wilder country,
 That 's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,
 Branched through and through with many a vein
 Whence iron 's dug, and copper 's dealt ;

Look right, look left, look straight before,—
Beneath they mine, above they smelt,
Copper-ore and iron-ore,
And forge and furnace mould and melt,
And so on, more and ever more,
Till at the last, for a bounding belt,
Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore,
—And the whole is our Duke's country.

III.

I was born the day this present Duke was—
(And O, says the song, ere I was old !)
In the castle where the other Duke was—
(When I was happy and young, not old !)
I in the kennel, he in the bower :
We are of like age to an hour.
My father was huntsman in that day ;
Who has not heard my father say
That, when a boar was brought to bay,
Three times, four times out of five,
With his huntspear he 'd contrive
To get the killing-place transfixed,
And pin him true, both eyes betwixt ?
And that 's why the old Duke would rather
He lost a salt-pit than my father,
And loved to have him ever in call ;
That 's why my father stood in the hall
When the old Duke brought his infant out
To show the people, and while they passed

The wondrous bantling round about,
 Was first to start at the outside blast
 As the Kaiser's courier blew his horn,
 Just a month after the babe was born.
 "And," quoth the Kaiser's courier, "since
 "The Duke has got an heir, our Prince
 "Needs the Duke's self at his side :"
 The Duke looked down and seemed to wince,
 But he thought of wars o'er the world wide,
 Castles a-fire, men on their march,
 The toppling tower, the crashing arch ;
 And up he looked, and awhile he eyed
 The row of crests and shields and banners
 Of all achievements after all manners,
 And "ay," said the Duke with a surly pride.
 The more was his comfort when he died
 At next year's end, in a velvet suit,
 With a gilt glove on his hand, and his foot
 In a silken shoe for a leather boot,
 Petticoated like a herald,
 In a chaniber next to an ante-room,
 Where he breathed the breath of page and groom,
 What he called stink, and they, perfume :
 —They should have set him on red Berold
 Mad with pride, like fire to manage !
 They should have got his cheek fresh tannage
 Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine !
 Had they stuck on his fist a rough-foot merlin !
 (Hark, the wind 's on the heath at its game !

Oh for a noble falcon-lanner
To flap each broad wing like a banner,
And turn in the wind, and dance like flame !)
Had they croached a cask of white beer from Berlin
—Or if you incline to prescribe mere wine
Put to his lips when they saw him pine,
A cup of our own Moldavia fine,
Cotnar for instance, green as May sorrel
And ropy with sweet,—we shall not quarrel.

IV.

So, at home, the sick tall yellow Duchess
Was left with the infant in her clutches,
She being the daughter of God knows who :
And now was the time to revisit her tribe.
Abroad and afar they went, the two,
And let our people rail and gibe
At the empty hall and extinguished fire,
As loud as we liked, but ever in vain,
Till after long years we had our desire,
And back came the Duke and his mother again.

V.

And he came back the pertest little ape
That ever affronted human shape ;
Full of his travel, struck at himself.
You 'd say, he despised our bluff old ways ?
—Not he ! For in Paris they told the elf
That our rough North land was the Land of Lays,
The one good thing left in evil days ;

Since the Mid-Age was the Heroic Time,
 And only in wild nooks like ours
 Could you taste of it yet as in its prime,
 And see true castles, with proper towers,
 Young-hearted women, old-minded men,
 And manners now as manners were then.
 So, all that the old Dukes had been, without knowing it,
 This Duke would fain know he was, without being it ;
 'T was not for the joy's self, but the joy of his showing it,
 Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our seeing it,
 He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out,
 The souls of them fumed-forth, the hearts of them torn-out :
 And chief in the chase his neck he perilled,
 On a lathy horse, all legs and length,
 With blood for bone, all speed, no strength ;
 —They should have set him on red Berold
 With the red eye slow consuming in fire,
 And the thin stiff ear like an abbey spire !

VI.

Well, such as he was, he must marry, we heard :
 And out of a convent, at the word,
 Came the lady, in time of spring.
 —Oh, old thoughts they cling, they cling !
 That day, I know, with a dozen oaths
 I clad myself in thick hunting-clothes
 Fit for the chase of urox or buffle
 In winter-time when you need to muffle.
 But the Duke had a mind we should cut a figure,

And so we saw the lady arrive :
My friend, I have seen a white crane bigger !
She was the smallest lady alive,
Made in a piece of nature's madness,
Too small, almost, for the life and gladness
That over-filled her, as some hive
Out of the bears' reach on the high trees
Is crowded with its safe merry bees :
In truth, she was not hard to please !
Up she looked, down she looked, round at the mead,
Straight at the castle, that 's best indeed
To look at from outside the walls :
As for us, styled the " serfs and thralls,"
She as much thanked me as if she had said it,
(With her eyes, do you understand ?)
Because I patted her horse while I led it ;
And Max, who rode on her other hand,
Said, no bird flew past but she inquired
What its true name was, nor ever seemed tired—
If that was an eagle she saw hover,
And the green and grey bird on the field was the plover.
When suddenly appeared the Duke :
And as down she sprung, the small foot pointed
On to my hand,—as with a rebuke,
And as if his backbone were not jointed,
The Duke stepped rather aside than forward,
And welcomed her with his grandest smile ;
And, mind you, his mother all the while
Chilled in the rear, like a wind to Nor'ward ;

And up, like a weary yawn, with its pullies
Went, in a shriek, the rusty portcullis ;
And, like a glad sky the north-wind sullies,
The lady's face stopped its play,
As if her first hair had grown grey ;
For such things must begin some one day.

VII.

In a day or two she was well again ;
As who should say, " You labour in vain !
" This is all a jest against God, who meant
" I should ever be, as I am, content
" And glad in his sight ; therefore, glad I will be."
So, smiling as at first went she.

VIII.

She was active, stirring, all fire—
Could not rest, could not tire—
To a stone she might have given life !
(I myself loved once, in my day)
—For a shepherd's, miner's, huntsman's wife,
(I had a wife, I know what I say)
Never in all the world such an one !
And here was plenty to be done,
And she that could do it, great or small,
She was to do nothing at all.
There was already this man in his post,
This in his station, and that in his office,
And the Duke's plan admitted a wife, at most,
To meet his eye, with the other trophies,

Now outside the hall, now in it,
To sit thus, stand thus, see and be seen,
At the proper place in the proper minute,
And die away the life between.
And it was amusing enough, each infraction
Of rule—(but for after-sadness that came)
To hear the consummate self-satisfaction
With which the young Duke and the old dame
Would let her advise, and criticise,
And, being a fool, instruct the wise,
And, child-like, parcel out praise or blame :
They bore it all in complacent guise,
As though an artificer, after contriving
A wheel-work image as if it were living,
Should find with delight it could motion to strike him !
So found the Duke, and his mother like him :
The lady hardly got a rebuff—
That had not been contemptuous enough,
With his cursed smirk, as he nodded applause,
And kept off the old mother-cat's claws.

IX.

So, the little lady grew silent and thin,
Paling and ever paling,
As the way is with a hid chagrin ;
And the Duke perceived that she was ailing,
And said in his heart, " 'T is done to spite me,
" But I shall find in my power to right me !"
Don't swear, friend ! The old one, many a year,
Is in hell, and the Duke's self . . . you shall hear.

x.

Well, early in autumn, at first winter-warning,
 When the stag had to break with his foot, of a morning,
 A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice,
 That covered the pond till the sun, in a trice,
 Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold,
 And another and another, and faster and faster,
 Till, dimpling to blindness, the wide water rolled :
 Then it so chanced that the Duke our master
 Asked himself what were the pleasures in season,
 And found, since the calendar bade him be hearty,
 He should do the Middle Age no treason
 In resolving on a hunting-party.
 Always provided, old books showed the way of it !
 What meant old poets by their strictures ?
 And when old poets had said their say of it,
 How taught old painters in their pictures ?
 We must revert to the proper channels,
 Workings in tapestry, paintings on panels,
 And gather up woodcraft's authentic traditions :
 Here was food for our various ambitions,
 As on each case, exactly stated—
 To encourage your dog, now, the properest chirrup,
 Or best prayer to St. Hubert on mounting your stirrup—
 We of the household took thought and debated.
 Blessed was he whose back ached with the jerkin
 His sire was wont to do forest-work in ;
 Blessedder he who nobly sunk "ohs"
 And "ahs" while he tugged on his grandsire's trunk-hose ;

What signified hats if they had no rims on,
Each slouching before and behind like the scallop,
And able to serve at sea for a shallop,
Loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson ?
So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme on 't,
What with our Venerers, Prickers and Verderers,
Might hope for real hunters at length and not murderers,
And oh the Duke's tailor, he had a hot time on 't !

XI.

Now you must know that when the first dizziness
Of flap-hats and buff-coats and jack-boots subsided,
The Duke put this question, " The Duke's part provided,
" Had not the Duchess some share in the business ? "
For out of the mouth of two or three witnesses
Did he establish all fit-or-unfitnesses :
And, after much laying of heads together,
Somebody's cap got a notable feather
By the announcement with proper unction
That he had discovered the lady's function ;
Since ancient authors gave this tenet,
" When horns wind a mort and the deer is at siege,
" Let the dame of the castle prick forth on her jennet,
" And, with water to wash the hands of her liege
" In a clean ewer with a fair toweling,
" Let her preside at the disemboweling."
Now, my friend, if you had so little religion
As to catch a hawk, some falcon-lanner,
And thrust her broad wings like a banner
Into a coop for a vulgar pigeon ;

And if day by day and week by week
 You cut her claws, and sealed her eyes,
 And clipped her wings, and tied her beak,
 Would it cause you any great surprise
 If, when you decided to give her an airing,
 You found she needed a little preparing ?
 — I say, should you be such a curmudgeon,
 If she clung to the perch, as to take it in dudgeon ?
 Yet when the Duke to his lady signified,
 Just a day before, as he judged most dignified
 In what a pleasure she was to participate,—
 And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,
 Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,
 As if pressed by fatigue even he could not dissipate,
 And duly acknowledged the Duke's forethought,
 But spoke of her health, if her health were worth aught,
 Of the weight by day and the watch by night,
 And much wrong now that used to be right,
 So, thanking him, declined the hunting,—
 Was conduct ever more affronting ?
 With all the ceremony settled—
 With the towel ready, and the sewer
 Polishing up his oldest ewer,
 And the jennet pitched upon, a piebald,
 Black-barred, cream-coated and pink eye-balled,—
 No wonder if the Duke was nettled !
 And when she persisted nevertheless,—
 Well, I suppose here 's the time to confess
 That there ran half round our lady's chaniber

A balcony none of the hardest to clamber ;
And that Jacynth the tire-woman, ready in waiting,
Stayed in call outside, what need of relating ?
And since Jacynth was like a June rose, why, a fervent
Adorer of Jacynth of course was your servant ;
And if she had the habit to peep through the casement,
How could I keep at any vast distance ?
And so, as I say, on the lady's persistence,
The Duke, dumb stricken with amazement,
Stood for a while in a sultry smother,
And then, with a smile that partook of the awful,
Turned her over to his yellow mother
To learn what was held decorous and lawful ;
And the mother smelt blood with a cat-like instinct,
As her cheek quick whitened thro' all its quince-tinct.
Oh, but the lady heard the whole truth at once !
What meant she ?—Who was she ?—Her duty and
station,
'The wisdom of age and the folly of youth, at once,
Its decent regard and its fitting relation—
In brief, my friends, set all the devils in hell free
And turn them out to carouse in a belfry
And treat the priests to a fifty-part canon,
And then you may guess how that tongue of hers ran on !
Well, somehow or other it ended at last
And, licking her whiskers, out she passed ;
And after her,—making (he hoped) a face
Like Emperor Nero or Sultan Saladin,
Stalked the Duke's self with the austere grace

Of ancient hero or modern paladin,
From door to staircase—oh such a solemn
Unbending of the vertebral column !

XII.

However, at sunrise our company mustered ;
And here was the huntsman bidding unkennel,
And there 'neath his bonnet the pricker blustered,
With feather dank as a bough of wet fennel ;
For the court-yard walls were filled with fog
You might cut as an axe chops a log—
Like so much wool for colour and bulkiness ;
And out rode the Duke in a perfect sulkiness,
Since, before breakfast, a man feels but queasily,
And a sinking at the lower abdomen
Begins the day with indifferent omen.
And lo, as he looked around uneasily,
The sun ploughed the fog up and drove it asunder
This way and that from the valley under ;
And, looking through the court-yard arch,
Down in the valley, what should meet him
But a troop of Gipsies on their march ?
No doubt with the annual gifts to greet him.

XIII.

Now, in your land, Gipsies reach you, only
After reaching all lands beside ;
North they go, South they go, trooping or lonely,
And still, as they travel far and wide,

Catch they and keep now a trace here, a trace there,
That puts you in mind of a place here, a place there.
But with us, I believe they rise out of the ground,
And nowhere else, I take it, are found
With the earth-tint yet so freshly embrowned :
Born, no doubt, like insects which breed on
The very fruit they are meant to feed on.
For the earth—not a use to which they don't turn it,
The ore that grows in the mountain's womb,
Or the sand in the pits like a honeycomb,
They sift and soften it, bake it and burn it—
Whether they weld you, for instance, a snaffle
With side-bars never a brute can baffle ;
Or a lock that 's a puzzle of wards within wards ;
Or, if your colt's fore-foot inclines to curve inwards,
Horseshoes they hammer which turn on a swivel
And won't allow the hoof to shrivel.
Then they cast bells like the shell of the winkle
That keep a stout heart in the ram with their tinkle ;
But the sand—they pinch and pound it like otters ;
Commend me to Gipsy glass-makers and potters !
Glasses they 'll blow you, crystal-clear,
Where just a faint cloud of rose shall appear,
As if in pure water you dropped and let die
A bruised black-blooded mulberry ;
And that other sort, their crowning pride,
With long white threads distinct inside,
Like the lake-flower's fibrous roots which dangle
Loose such a length and never tangle,

Where the bold sword-lily cuts the clear waters,
 And the cup-lily couches with all the white daughters :
 Such are the works they put their hand to,
 The uses they turn and twist iron and sand to.
 And these made the troop, which our Duke saw sally
 Toward his castle from out of the valley,
 Men and women, like new-hatched spiders,
 Come out with the morning to greet our riders.
 And up they wound till they reached the ditch,
 Whereat all stopped save one, a witch
 That I knew, as she hobbled from the group,
 By her gait directly and her stoop,
 I, whom Jacynth was used to importune
 'To let that same witch tell us our fortune.
 The oldest Gipsy then above ground ;
 And, sure as the autumn season came round,
 She paid us a visit for profit or pastime,
 And every time, as she swore, for the last time.
 And presently she was seen to sidle
 Up to the Duke till she touched his bridle,
 So that the horse of a sudden reared up
 As under its nose the old witch peered up
 With her worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes
 Of no use now but to gather brine,
 And began a kind of level whine
 Such as they used to sing to their viols
 When their ditties they go grinding
 Up and down with nobody minding :
 And then, as of old, at the end of the humming

Her usual presents were forthcoming
—A dog-whistle blowing the fiercest of trebles,
(Just a sea-shore stone holding a dozen fine pebbles,)
Or a porcelain mouth-piece to screw on a pipe-end,—
And so she awaited her annual stipend.
But this time, the Duke would scarcely vouchsafe
A word in reply ; and in vain she felt
With twitching fingers at her belt
For the purse of sleek pine-martin pelt,
Ready to put what he gave in her pouch safe,—
Till, either to quicken his apprehension,
Or possibly with an after-intention,
She was come, she said, to pay her duty
To the new Duchess, the youthful beauty.
No sooner had she named his lady,
Than a shine lit up the face so shady,
And its smirk returned with a novel meaning—
For it struck him, the babe just wanted weaning ;
If one gave her a taste of what life was and sorrow,
She, foolish to-day, would be wiser to-morrow ;
And who so fit a teacher of trouble
As this sordid crone bent well-nigh double ?
So, glancing at her wolf-skin vesture,
(If such it was, for they grow so hirsute
That their own fleece serves for natural fur-suit)
He was contrasting, 't was plain from his gesture,
The life of the lady so flower-like and delicate
With the loathsome squalor of this helicat.
I, in brief, was the man the Duke beckoned

From out of the throng, and while I drew near
 He told the crone—as I since have reckoned
 By the way he bent and spoke into her ear
 With circumspection and mystery—
 The main of the lady's history,
 Her frowardness and ingratitude :
 And for all the crone's submissive attitude
 I could see round her mouth the loose plaits tightening,
 And her brow with assenting intelligence brightening,
 As though she engaged with hearty goodwill
 Whatever he now might enjoin to fulfil,
 And promised the lady a thorough frightening.
 And so, just giving her a glimpse
 Of a purse, with the air of a man who imps
 The wing of the hawk that shall fetch the hernshaw,
 He bade me take the Gipsy mother
 And set her telling some story or other
 Of hill or dale, oak-wood or fernshaw,
 To wile away a weary hour .
 For the lady left alone in her bower,
 Whose mind and body craved exertion
 And yet shrank from all better diversion.

XIV.

Then clapping heel to his horse, the mere curveter,
 Out rode the Duke, and after his hollo
 Horses and hounds swept, huntsman and servitor,
 And back I turned and bade the crone follow.
 And what makes me confident what 's to be told you
 Had all along been of this crone's devising,

Is, that, on looking round sharply, behold you,
There was a novelty quick as surprising :
For first, she had shot up a full head in stature,
And her step kept pace with mine nor faltered,
As if age had foregone its usurpature,
And the ignoble mien was wholly altered,
And the face looked quite of another nature,
And the change reached too, whatever the change meant,
Her shaggy wolf-skin cloak's arrangement :
For where its tatters hung loose like sedges,
Gold coins were glittering on the edges,
Like the band-roll strung with tomans
Which proves the veil a Persian woman's :
And under her brow, like a snail's horns newly
Come out as after the rain he paces,
Two unmistakeable eye-points duly
Live and aware looked out of their places.
So, we went and found Jacynth at the entry
Of the lady's chamber standing sentry ;
I told the command and produced my companion,
And Jacynth rejoiced to admit any one,
For since last night, by the same token,
Not a single word had the lady spoken :
They went in both to the presence together,
While I in the balcony watched the weather.

xv.

And now, what took place at the very first of all,
I cannot tell, as I never could learn it ;

Jacynth constantly wished a curse to fall
 On that little head of hers and burn it
 If she knew how she came to drop so soundly
 Asleep of a sudden and there continue
 The whole time sleeping as profoundly
 As one of the boars my father would pin you
 Twixt the eyes where life holds garrison,
 —Jacynth forgive me the comparison !
 But where I begin my own narration
 Is a little after I took my station
 To breathe the fresh air from the balcony,
 And, having in those days a falcon eye,
 To follow the hunt thro' the open country,
 From where the bushes thinlier crested
 The hillocks, to a plain where 's not one tree.
 When, in a moment, my ear was arrested
 By—was it singing, or was it saying,
 Or a strange musical instrument playing
 In the chamber?—and to be certain
 I pushed the lattice, pulled the curtain,
 And there lay Jacynth asleep,
 Yet as if a watch she tried to keep,
 In a rosy sleep along the floor
 With her head against the door ;
 While in the midst, on the seat of state,
 Was a queen—the Gipsy woman late,
 With head and face downbent
 On the lady's head and face intent :
 For, coiled at her feet like a child at ease,

'The lady sat between her knees,
And o'er them the lady's clasped hands met,
And on those hands her chin was set,
And her upturned face met the face of the crone
Wherein the eyes had grown and grown
As if she could double and quadruple
At pleasure the play of either pupil
—Very like, by her hands' slow fanning,
As up and down like a gor-crow's flappers
They moved to measure, or bell clappers.
I said, is it blessing, is it banning,
Do they applaud you or burlesque you—
Those hands and fingers with no flesh on?
But, just as I thought to spring in to the rescue,
At once I was stopped by the lady's expression :
For it was life her eyes were drinking
From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,
—Life's pure fire received without shrinking,
Into the heart and breast whose heaving
Told you no single drop they were leaving,
—Life, that filling her, passed redundant
Into her very hair, back swerving
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,
As her head thrown back showed the white throat
curving,
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,
Moving to the mystic measure,
Bounding as the bosom bounded.
I stopped short, more and more confounded,

As still her cheeks burned and eyes glistened,
 As she listened and she listened :
 When all at once a hand detained me,
 The selfsame contagion gained me,
 And I kept time to the wondrous chime,
 Making out words and prose and rhyme,
 Till it seemed that the music furl'd
 Its wings like a task fulfilled, and dropped
 From under the words it first had propped,
 And left them midway in the world,
 Word took word as hand takes hand,
 I could hear at last, and understand,
 And when I held the unbroken thread,
 The Gipsy said :—

“ And so at last we find my tribe.
 “ And so I set thee in the midst,
 “ And to one and all of them describe
 “ What thou saidst and what thou didst,
 “ Our long and terrible journey through,
 “ And all thou art ready to say and do
 “ In the trials that remain :
 “ I trace them the vein and the other vein
 “ That meet on thy brow and part again,
 “ Making our rapid mystic mark ;
 “ And I bid my people prove and probe
 “ Each eye's profound and glorious globe
 “ Till they detect the kindred spark
 “ In those depths so dear and dark,

“ Like the spots that snap and burst and flee,
“ Circling over the midnight sea.
“ And on that round young cheek of thine
“ I make them recognise the tinge,
“ As when of the costly scarlet wine
“ They drip so much as will impinge
“ And spread in a thinnest scale afloat
“ One thick gold drop from the olive’s coat
“ Over a silver plate whose sheen
“ Still thro’ the mixture shall be seen.
“ For so I prove thee, to one and all,
“ Fit, when my people ope their breast,
“ To see the sign, and hear the call,
“ And take the vow, and stand the test
“ Which adds one more child to the rest—
“ When the breast is bare and the arms are wide,
“ And the world is left outside.
“ For there is probation to decree,
“ And many and long must the trials be
“ Thou shalt victoriously endure,
“ If that brow is true and those eyes are sure ;
“ Like a jewel-finder’s fierce assay
“ Of the prize he dug from its mountain tomb —
“ Let once the vindicating ray
“ Leap out amid the anxious gloom,
“ And steel and fire have done their part
“ And the prize falls on its finder’s heart ;
“ So, trial after trial past,
“ Wilt thou fall at the very last

“ Breathless, half in trance
 “ With the thrill of the great deliverance,
 “ Into our arms for evermore ;
 “ And thou shalt know, those arms once curled
 “ About thee, what we knew before,
 “ How love is the only good in the world.
 “ Henceforth be loved as heart can love,
 “ Or brain devise, or hand approve !
 “ Stand up, look below,
 “ It is our life at thy feet we throw
 “ To step with into light and joy ;
 “ Not a power of life but we employ
 “ To satisfy thy nature’s want ;
 “ Art thou the tree that props the plant,
 “ Or the climbing plant that seeks the tree—
 “ Canst thou help us, must we help thee ?
 “ If any two creatures grew into one,
 “ They would do more than the world has done,
 “ Though each apart were never so weak,
 “ Ye vainly through the world should seek
 “ For the knowledge and the might
 “ Which in such union grew their right :
 “ So, to approach at least that end,
 “ And blend,—as much as may be, blend
 “ Thee with us or us with thee,—
 “ As climbing plant or propping-tree,
 “ Shall some one deck thee, over and down,
 “ Up and about, with blossoms and leaves ?
 “ Fix his heart’s fruit for thy garland crown,

“ Cling with his soul as the gourd-vine cleaves,
“ Die on thy boughs and disappear
“ While not a leaf of thine is sere ?
“ Or is the other fate in store,
“ And art thou fitted to adore,
“ To give thy wondrous self away,
“ And take a stronger nature’s sway ?
“ I foresee and could foretell
“ Thy future portion, sure and well :
“ But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,
“ Let them say what thou shalt do !
“ Only be sure thy daily life,
“ In its peace or in its strife,
“ Never shall be unobserved ;
“ We pursue thy whole career,
“ And hope for it, or, doubt, or fear,—
“ Lo, has thou kept thy path or swerved,
“ We are beside thee in all thy ways,
“ With our blame, with our praise,
“ Our shame to feel, our pride to show,
“ Glad, angry—but indifferent, no !
“ Whether it be thy lot to go,
“ For the good of us all, where the haters meet
“ In the crowded city’s horrible street ;
“ Or thou step alone through the morass
“ Where never sound yet was
“ Save the dry quick clap of the stork’s bill,
“ For the air is still, and the water still,
“ When the blue breast of the dipping coot

" Dives under, and all is mute.
 " So, at the last shall come old age,
 " Decrepit as befits that stage ;
 " How else wouldst thou retire apart
 " With the hoarded memories of thy heart,
 " And gather all to the very least
 " Of the fragments of life's earlier feast,
 " Let fall through eagerness to find
 " The crowning dainties yet behind ?
 " Ponder on the entire past
 " Laid together thus at last,
 " When the twilight helps to fuse
 " The first fresh with the faded hues,
 " And the outline of the whole,
 " As round eve's shades their framework roll,
 " Grandly fronts for once thy soul.
 " And then as, 'mid the dark, a gleam
 " Of yet another morning breaks,
 " And like the hand which ends a dream,
 " Death, with the might of his sunbeam,
 " Touches the flesh and the soul awakes,
 " Then—"

Ay, then indeed something would happen !
 But what ? For here her voice changed like a bird's ,
 There grew more of the music and less of the words ;
 Had Jacynth only been by me to clap pen
 To paper and put you down every syllable
 With those clever clerkly fingers,
 All I 've forgotten as well as what lingers

In this old brain of mine that 's but ill able
To give you even this poor version
Of the speech I spoil, as it were, with stammering
—More fault of those who had the hammering
Of prosody into me and syntax,
And did it, not with hobnails but tintacks !
But to return from this excursion,—
Just, do you mark, when the song was sweetest,
The peace most deep and the charm completest,
There came, shall I say, a snap—
And the charm vanished !
And my sense returned, so strangely banished,
And, starting as from a nap,
I knew the crone was betwitching my lady,
With Jacynth asleep ; and but one spring made 1
Down from the casement, round to the portal,
Another minute and I had entered,—
When the door opened, and more than mortal
Stood, with a face where to my mind centred
All beauties I ever saw or shall see,
The Duchess : I stopped as if struck by palsy.
She was so different, happy and beautiful,
I felt at once that all was best,
And that I had nothing to do, for the rest,
But wait her commands, obey and be dutiful.
Not that, in fact, there was any commanding ;
I saw the glory of her eye,
And the brow's height and the breast's expanding,
And I was hers to live or to die.

As for finding what she wanted,
 You know God Almighty granted
 Such little signs should serve wild creatures
 To tell one another all their desires,
 So that each knows what his friend requires,
 And does its bidding without teachers.
 I preceded her ; the crone
 Followed silent and alone ;
 I spoke to her, but she merely jabbered
 In the old style ; both her eyes had slunk
 Back to their pits ; her stature shrunk ;
 In short, the soul in its body sunk
 Like a blade sent home to its scabbard.
 We descended, I preceding ;
 Crossed the court with nobody heeding ;
 All the world was at the chase,
 The court-yard like a desert-place,
 The stable emptied of its small fry ;
 I saddled myself the very palfrey
 I remember patting while it carried her,
 The day she arrived and the Duke married her.
 And, do you know, though it 's easy deceiving
 Oneself in such matters, I can't help believing
 The lady had not forgotten it either,
 And knew the poor devil so much beneath her
 Would have been only too glad for her service
 To dance on hot ploughshares like a Turk dervise,
 But, unable to pay proper duty where owing it,
 Was reduced to that pitiful method of showing it.

For though the moment I began setting
His saddle on my own nag of Berold's begetting,
(Not that I meant to be obtrusive)
She stopped me, while his rug was shifting,
By a single rapid finger's lifting,
And, with a gesture kind but conclusive,
And a little shake of the head, refused me,—
I say, although she never used me,
Yet when she was mounted, the Gipsy behind her,
And I ventured to remind her,
I suppose with a voice of less steadiness
Than usual, for my feeling exceeded me,
—Something to the effect that I was in readiness
Whenever God should please she needed me,—
Then, do you know, her face looked down on me
With a look that placed a crown on me,
And she felt in her bosom,—mark, her bosom—
And, as a flower-tree drops its blossom,
Dropped me . . . ah, had it been a purse
Of silver, my friend, or gold that 's worse,
Why, you see, as soon as I found myself
So understood,—that a true heart so may gain
Such a reward,—I should have gone home again,
Kissed Jacynth, and soberly drowned myself!
It was a little plait of hair
Such as friends in a convent make
To wear, each for the other's sake,—
This, see, which at my breast I wear,
Ever did (rather to Jacynth's grudgment),

And ever shall, till the Day of Judgment.
 And then,—and then,—to cut short,—this is idle,
 These are feelings it is not good to foster,—
 I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,
 And the palfrey bounded,—and so we lost her.

XVI.

When the liquor 's out why clink the cannikin?
 I did think to describe you the panic in
 The redoubtable breast of our master the mannikin,
 And what was the pitch of his mother's yellowness,
 How she turned as a shark to snap the spare-rib
 Clean off, sailors say, from a pearl-diving Carib,
 When she heard, what she called the flight of the feloness
 —But it seems such child's play,
 What they said and did with the lady away!
 And to dance on, when we 've lost the music,
 Always made me—and no doubt makes you—sick.
 Nay, to my mind, the world's face looked so stern
 As that sweet form disappeared through the postern,
 She that kept it in constant good humour,
 It ought to have stopped; there seemed nothing to do
 more.

But the world thought otherwise and went on,
 And my head 's one that its spite was spent on:
 Thirty years are fled since that morning,
 And with them all my head's adorning.
 Nor did the old Duchess die outright,
 As you expect, of suppressed spite,

The natural end of every adder
Not suffered to empty its poison-bladder :
But she and her son agreed, I take it,
That no one should touch on the story to wake it,
For the wound in the Duke's pride rankled fiery,
So, they made no search and small inquiry—
And when fresh Gipsies have paid us a visit, I've
Noticed the couple were never inquisitive,
But told them they 're folks the Duke do n't want here,
And bade them make haste and cross the frontier.
Brief, the Duchess was gone and the Duke was glad of it,
And the old one was in the young one's stead,
And took, in her place, the household's head,
And a blessed time the household had of it !
And were I not, as a man may say, cautious
How I trench, more than needs, on the nauseous,
I could favour you with sundry touches
Of the paint-smutches with which the Duchess
Heightened the mellowness of her cheek's yellowness
(To get on faster) until at last her
Cheek grew to be one master-plaster
Of mucus and fucus from mere use of ceruse :
In short, she grew from scalp to udder
Just the object to make you shudder.

XVII.

You 're my friend—
What a thing friendship is, world without end !
How it gives the heart and soul a stir-up

As if somebody broached you a glorious runlet,
 And poured out, all lovelily, sparkingly, sunlit,
 Our green Moldavia, the streaky syrup,
 Cotnar as old as the time of the Druids—
 Friendship may match with that monarch of fluids ;
 Each supple a dry brain, fills you its ins-and-outs,
 Gives your life's hour-glass a shake when the thin sand
 doubts

Whether to run on or stop short, and guarantees
 Age is not all made of stark sloth and arrant ease.
 I have seen my little lady once more,
 Jacynth, the Gipsy, Berold, and the rest of it,
 For to me spoke the Duke, as I told you before ;
 I always wanted to make a clean breast of it :
 And now it is made—why, my heart's blood, that went
 trickle,

Trickle, but anon, in such muddy driblets,
 Is pumped up brisk now, through the main ventricle,
 And genially floats me about the giblets.

I 'll tell you what I intend to do :
 I must see this fellow his sad life through—
 He is our Duke, after all,

And I, as he says, but a serf and thrall.
 My father was born here, and I inherit
 His fame, a chain he bound his son with ;
 Could I pay in a lump I should prefer it,
 But there 's no mine to blow up and get done with :
 So, I must stay till the end of the chapter.
 For, as to our middle-age-manners-adapter,

Be it a thing to be glad on or sorry on,
Some day or other, his head in a morion
And breast in a hauberk, his heels he 'll kick up,
Slain by an onslaught fierce of hiccup.
And then, when red doth the sword of our Duke rust,
And its leathern sheath lie o'ergrown with a blue crust,
Then I shall scrape together my earnings ;
For, you see, in the churchyard Jacynth reposes,
And our children all went the way of the roses :
It 's a long lane that knows no turnings.
One needs but little tackle to travel in ;
So, just one stout cloak shall I indue :
And for a staff, what beats the javelin
With which his boars my father pinned you ?
And then, for a purpose you shall hear presently,
Taking some Cotnar, a tight plump skinfull,
I shall go journeying, who but I, pleasantly !
Sorrow is vain and despondency sinful.
What 's a man's age ? He must hurry more, that 's all ;
Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to hold :
When we mind labour, then only, we 're too old—
What age had Methusalem when he begat Saul ?
And at last, as its haven some buffeted ship sees,
(Come all the way from the north-parts with sperm oil)
I hope to get safely out of the turmoil
And arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies,
And find my lady, or hear the last news of her
From some old thief and son of Lucifer,
His forehead chapleted green with wreathy hop

Sunburned all over like an Æthiop.
 And when my Cotnar begins to operate
 And the tongue of the rogue to run at a proper rate,
 And our wine-skin, tight once, shows each flaccid dent,
 I shall drop in with—as if by accident—
 “ You never knew then, how it all ended,
 “ What fortune good or bad attended
 “ The little lady your Queen befriended ? ”
 —And when that ’s told me, what ’s remaining ?
 This world ’s too hard for my explaining.
 The same wise judge of matters equine
 Who still preferred some slim four-year-old
 To the big-boned stock of mighty Berold,
 And, for strong Cotnar, drank French weak wine,
 He also must be such a lady’s scorner !
 Smooth Jacob still robs homely Esau :
 Now up, now down, the world ’s one see-saw.
 —So, I shall find out some snug corner
 Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight,
 Turn myself round and bid the world good night ;
 And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet’s blowing
 Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)
 To a world where will be no further throwing
 Pearls before swine that can ’t value them. Amen !

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL,

SHORTLY AFTER THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING IN EUROPE.

LET us begin and carry up this corpse,

Singing together.

Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes,

Each in its tether

Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,

Cared-for till cock-crow :

Look out if yonder be not day again

Rimming the rock-row !

That 's the appropriate country ; there, man's thought,

Rarer, intenser,

Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,

Chafes in the censer.

Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop ;

Seek we sepulture

On a tall mountain, citied to the top,

Crowded with culture !

All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels ;

Clouds overcome it ;

No, yonder sparkle is the citadel's

Circling its summit.

Thither our path lies ; wind we up the heights :

Wait ye the warning ?

Our low life was the level's and the night's ;

He 's for the morning.

Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
 'Ware the beholders !

This is our master, famous calm and dead,
 Borne on our shoulders.

Sleep, crop and herd ! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft:
 Safe from the weather !

He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
 Singing together.

He was a man born with thy face and throat,
 Lyric Apollo !

Long he lived nameless : how should spring take note
 Winter would follow ?

Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone !
 Cramped and diminished,

Moaned he, " New measures, other feet anon !
 " My dance is finished ? "

No, that 's the world's way : (keep the mountain-side,
 Make for the city !)

He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
 Over men's pity ;

Left play for work, and grappled with the world
 Bent on escaping :

" What's in the scroll," quoth he, " thou keepest furled ?
 " Show me their shaping,

" Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,—
 " Give !"—So, he gowned him,

Straight got by heart that book to its last page :
 Learned, we found him.

Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
Accents uncertain :

“ Time to taste life,” another would have said,
“ Up with the curtain !”

This man said rather, “ Actual life comes next ?
“ Patience a moment !

“ Grant I have mastered learning’s crabbed text,
“ Still there ’s the comment.

“ Let me know all ! Prate not of most or least,
“ Painful or easy !

“ Even to the crumbs I ’d fain eat up the feast,
“ Ay, nor feel queasy.”

Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
When he had learned it,

When he had gathered all books had to give !
Sooner, he spurned it.

Image the whole, then execute the parts—
Fancy the fabric

Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
Ere mortar dab brick !

(Here ’s the town-gate reached : there ’s the market-place
Gaping before us.)

Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
(Hearten our chorus !)

That before living he ’d learn how to live—
No end to learning :

Earn the means first—God surely will contrive
Use for our earning.

Others mistrust and say, "But time escapes :

"Live now or never !"

He said, "What 's time? Leave Now for dogs and
apes !

"Man has Forever."

Back to his book then : deeper drooped his head :

Calculus racked him :

Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead :

Tussis attacked him.

"Now, master, take a little rest !"—not he !

(Caution redoubled,

Step two a-breast, the way winds narrowly !)

Not a whit troubled,

Back to his studies, fresher than at first,

Fierce as a dragon

He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst)

Sucked at the flagon.

Oh, if we draw a circle premature,

Heedless of far gain,

Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure

Bad is our bargain !

Was it not great ? did not he throw on God,

(He loves the burthen)—

God's task to make the heavenly period

Perfect the earthen ?

Did not he magnify the mind, show clear

Just what it all meant ?

He would not discount life, as fools do here,

Paid by instalment.

He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success
Found, or earth's failure :

“ Wilt thou trust death or not ? ” He answered

“ Yes !

“ Hence with life's pale lure ! ”

That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it :

This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.

That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred 's soon hit :

This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.

That, has the world here—should he need the next,
Let the world mind him !

This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.

So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar ;

Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife :
While he could stammer

He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be !—
Properly based *Oun*—

Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
Dead from the waist down.

Well, here 's the platform, here 's the proper place :
Hail to your purlieus,

All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews !

Here 's the top-peak ; the multitude below

Live, for they can, there :

This man decided not to Live but Know—

Bury this man there ?

Here—here 's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,

Lightnings are loosened,

Stars come and go ! Let joy break with the storm,

Peace let the dew send !

Lofty designs must close in like effects :

Loftily lying,

Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,

Living and dying.

THE HERETIC'S TRAGEDY.

A MIDDLE-AGE INTERLUDE.

ROSA MUNDI ; SEU, FULCITE ME FLORIBUS. A CONCEIT OF MASTER GYSBRECHT, CANON-REGULAR OF SAINT JODOCUS-BY-THE-BAR, YPRES CITY. CANTUQUE, *Virgilius*. AND HATH OFTEN BEEN SUNG AT HOCK-TIDE AND FESTIVALS. GAVISUS ERAM, *Jessides*.

(It would seem to be a glimpse from the burning of Jacques du Bourg-Molay, at Paris, A.D. 1314 ; as distorted by the refraction from Flemish brain to brain, during the course of a couple of centuries.)

I.

PREADMONISHETH THE ABBOT DEODAET.

THE Lord, we look to once for all,

Is the Lord we should look at, all at once :

He knows not to vary, saith Saint Paul,
Nor the shadow of turning, for the nonce.

See him no other than as he is !

Give both the infinitudes their due—
Infinite mercy, but, I wis,
As infinite a justice too.

[*Organ : plagal-cadence.*

As infinite a justice too.

II.

ONE SINGETH.

John, Master of the Temple of God,
Falling to sin the Unknown Sin,
What he bought of Emperor Aldabrod,
He sold it to Sultan Saladin :
Till, caught by Pope Clement, a-buzzing there,
Hornet-prince of the mad wasps' hive,
And clipt of his wings in Paris square,
They bring him now to be burned alive.

[*And wanteth there grace of lute or clavicithern, ye
shall say to confirm him who singeth—*

We bring John now to be burned alive.

III.

In the midst is a goodly gallows built ;
'Twixt fork and fork, a stake is stuck ;
But first they set divers tumbrils a-tilt,
Make a trench all round with the city muck ;
Inside they pile log upon log, good store ;
Faggots not few, blocks great and small,

Reach a man's mid-thigh, no less, no more,—
For they mean he should roast in the sight of all.

CHORUS.

We mean he should roast in the sight of all.

IV.

Good sappy bavins that kindle forthwith ;
Billets that blaze substantial and slow ;
Pine-stump split deftly, dry as pith ;
Larch-heart that chars to a chalk-white glow :
Then up they hoist me John in a chafe,
Sling him fast like a hog to scorch,
Spit in his face, then leap back safe,
Sing " Laudes " and bid clap-to the torch.

CHORUS.

Laus Deo—who bids clap-to the torch.

V.

John of the Temple, whose fame so bragged,
Is burning alive in Paris square !
How can he curse, if his mouth is gagged ?
Or wriggle his neck, with a collar there ?
Or heave his chest, while a band goes round ?
Or threat with his fist, since his arms are spliced ?
Or kick with his feet, now his legs are bound ?
—Thinks John, I will call upon Jesus Christ.

[*Here one crosseth himself*

VI.

Jesus Christ—John had bought and sold,
Jesus Christ—John had eaten and drunk ;

To him, the Flesh meant silver and gold.

(*Salvâ reverentiâ.*)

Now it was, "Saviour, bountiful lamb,

"I have roasted thee 'Turks, though men roast me!

"See thy servant, the plight wherein I am!

"Art thou a saviour? Save thou me!"

CHORUS.

'T is John the mocker cries, "Save thou me!"

VII.

Who maketh God's menace an idle word?

—Saith, it no more means what it proclaims,

Than a damsel's threat to her wanton bird—

For she too prattles of ugly names.

—Saith, he knoweth but one thing,—what he knows?

That God is good and the rest is breath;

Why else is the same styled Sharon's rose?

Once a rose, ever a rose, he saith.

CHORUS.

O, John shall yet find a rose, he saith!

VIII.

Alack, there be roses and roses, John!

Some, honied of taste like your leman's tongue:

Some, bitter; for why? (roast gaily on!)

Their tree struck root in devil's dung.

When Paul once reasoned of righteousness

And of temperance and of judgment to come,

Good Felix trembled, he could no less :
 John, snickering, crook'd his wicked thumb.

CHORUS.

What cometh to John of the wicked thumb?

IX.

Ha ha, John plucketh now at his rose
 To rid himself of a sorrow at heart !
 Lo,—petal on petal, fierce rays uncloset ;
 Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart ;
 And with blood for dew, the bosom boils ;
 And a gust of sulphur is all its smell ;
 And lo, he is horribly in the toils
 Of a coal-black giant flower of hell !

CHORUS.

What maketh heaven, That maketh hell.

X.

So, as John called now, through the fire amain,
 On the Name, he had cursed with, all his life—
 To the Person, he bought and sold again—
 For the Face, with his daily buffets rife—
 Feature by feature It took its place :
 And his voice, like a mad dog's choking bark,
 At the steady whole of the Judge's face—
 Died. Forth John's soul flared into the dark.

SUBJOINETH THE ABBOT DEODAET.

God help all poor souls lost in the dark !

HOLY-CROSS DAY.

ON WHICH THE JEWS WERE FORCED TO ATTEND AN ANNUAL
CHRISTIAN SERMON IN ROME.

[“ Now was come about Holy-Cross Day, and now must my lord preach his first sermon to the Jews : as it was of old cared for in the merciful bowels of the Church, that, so to speak, a crumb at least from her conspicuous table here in Rome, should be, though but once yearly, cast to the famishing dogs, under-trampled and bespitten-upon beneath the feet of the guests. And a moving sight in truth, this, of so many of the besotted blind restif and ready-to-perish Hebrews ! now maternally brought—nay, (for He saith, ‘ Compel them to come in ’) haled, as it were, by the head and hair, and against their obstinate hearts, to partake of the heavenly grace. What awakening, what striving with tears, what working of a yeasty conscience ! Nor was my lord wanting to himself on so apt an occasion ; witness the abundance of conversions which did incontinently reward him : though not to my lord he altogether the glory.”—*Diary by the Bishop’s Secretary, 1600.*]

What the Jews really said, on thus being driven to church, was rather to this effect :—

I.

FEE, faw, fum ! bubble and squeak !
Blessedest Thursday ’s the fat of the week.
Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,
Stinking and savoury, smug and gruff,
‘ Take the church-road, for the bell’s due chime
Gives us the summons—’t is sermon-time !

II.

Boh, here 's Barnabas ! Job, that 's you ?
Up stumps Solomon—bustling too ?
Shame, man ! greedy beyond your years
To handsel the bishop's shaving-shears ?
Fair play 's a jewel ! Leave friends in the lurch ?
Stand on a line ere you start for the church !

III.

Higgledy piggledy, packed we lie,
Rats in a hamper, swine in a sty,
Wasps in a bottle, frogs in a sieve,
Worms in a carcase, fleas in a sleeve.
Hist ! square shoulders, settle your thumbs
And buzz for the bishop—here he comes.

IV.

Bow, wow, wow—a bone for the dog !
I liken his Grace to an acorned hog.
What, a boy at his side, with the bloom of a lass,
To help and handle my lord's hour-glass !
Didst ever behold so lithe a chine ?
His cheek hath laps like a fresh-singed swine.

V.

Aaron 's asleep—shove hip to haunch,
Or somebody deal him a dig in the paunch !
Look at the purse with the tassel and knob,
And the gown with the angel and thingumbob !
What 's he at, quotha ? reading his text !
Now you 've his curtesy—and what comes next ?

VI.

See to our converts—you doomed black dozen—
No stealing away—nor cog nor cozen !
You five, that were thieves, deserve it fairly ;
You seven, that were beggars, will live less sparely ;
You took your turn and dipped in the hat,
Got fortune—and fortune gets you ; mind that !

VII.

Give your first groan—compunction 's at work ;
And soft ! from a Jew you mount to a Turk.
Lo, Micah,—the selfsame beard on chin
He was four times already converted in !
Here 's a knife, clip quick—it 's a sign of grace—
Or he ruins us all with his hanging-face.

VIII.

Whom now is the bishop a-leering at ?
I know a point where his text falls pat.
I 'll tell him to-morrow, a word just now
Went to my heart and made me vow
I meddle no more with the worst of trades—
Let somebody else pay his serenades.

IX.

Groan all together now, whee—hee—hee !
It 's a-work, it 's a-work, ah, woe is me !
It began, when a herd of us, picked and placed,
Were spurred through the Corso, stripped to the waist ;
Jew brutes, with sweat and blood well spent
To usher in worthily Christian Lent.

X.

It grew, when the hangman entered our bounds,
Yelled, pricked us out to his church like hounds :
It got to a pitch, when the hand indeed
Which gutted my purse, would throttle my creed :
And it overflows, when, to even the odd,
Men I helped to their sins, help me to their God.

XI.

But now, while the scapegoats leave our flock,
And the rest sit silent and count the clock,
Since forced to muse the appointed time
On these precious facts and truths sublime,—
Let us fitly employ it, under our breath,
In saying Ben Ezra's Song of Death.

XII.

For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,
Called sons and sons' sons to his side,
And spoke, "This world has been harsh and strange ;
"Something is wrong : there needeth a change.
"But what, or where? at the last or first?
"In one point only we sinned, at worst.

XIII.

"The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,
"And again in his border see Israel set.
"When Judah beholds Jerusalem,
"The stranger-seed shall be joined to them :
"To Jacob's House shall the Gentiles cleave.
"So the Prophet saith and his sons believe.

XIV.

“ Ay, the children of the chosen race
“ Shall carry and bring them to their place :
“ In the land of the Lord shall lead the same,
“ Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame,
“ When the slaves enslave, the oppressed ones o’er
“ The oppressor triumph for evermore ?

XV.

“ God spoke, and gave us the word to keep :
“ Bade never fold the hands nor sleep
“ ’Mid a faithless world,—at watch and ward,
“ Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.
“ By his servant Moses the watch was set :
“ Though near upon cock-crow, we keep it yet.

XVI.

“ Thou ! if thou wast he, who at mid-watch came,
“ By the starlight, naming a dubious name !
“ And if, too heavy with sleep—too rash
“ With fear—O thou, if that martyr-gash
“ Fell on thee coming to take thine own,
“ And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne—

XVII.

“ Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus.
“ But, the Judgment over, join sides with us !
“ Thine too is the cause ! and not more thine
“ Than ours, is the work of these dogs and swine,
“ Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed,
“ Who maintain thee in word, and defy thee in deed !

XVIII.

“ We withstood Christ then ? Be mindful how
 “ At least we withstand Barabbas now !
 “ Was our outrage sore ? But the worst we spared,
 “ To have called these—Christians, had we dared !
 “ Let defiance to them pay mistrust of thee,
 “ And Rome make amends for Calvary !

XIX.

“ By the torture, prolonged from age to age,
 “ By the infamy, Israel's heritage,
 “ By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace,
 “ By the badge of shame, by the felon's place,
 “ By the branding-tool, the bloody whip,
 “ And the summons to Christian fellowship,—

XX.

“ We boast our proof that at least the Jew
 “ Would wrest Christ's name from the Devil's crew.
 “ Thy face took never so deep a shade
 “ But we fought them in it, God our aid !
 “ A trophy to bear, as we march, thy band
 “ South, East, and on to the Pleasant Land !”

[*The present Pope abolished this bad business of the
 Sermon.*—R. B.]

PROTUS.

AMONG these latter busts we count by scores,
Half-emperors and quarter-emperors,
Each with his bay-leaf fillet, loose-thonged vest,
Loric and low-browed Gorgon on the breast,—
One loves a baby face, with violets there,
Violets instead of laurel in the hair,
As those were all the little locks could bear.

Now read here. “Protus ends a period
“ Of empery beginning with a god ;
“ Born in the porphyry chamber at Byzant,
“ Queens by his cradle, proud and ministrant :
“ And if he quickened breath there, ’t would like fire
“ Pantingly through the dim vast realm transpire.
“ A fame that he was missing, spread afar :
“ The world, from its four corners, rose in war,
“ Till he was borne out on a balcony
“ To pacify the world when it should see.
“ The captains ranged before him, one, his hand
“ Made baby points at, gained the chief command.
“ And day by day more beautiful he grew
“ In shape, all said, in feature and in hue,
“ While young Greek sculptors gazing on the child
“ Became, with old Greek sculpture, reconciled.

"Already sages laboured to condense
 "In easy tomes a life's experience :
 "And artists took grave counsel to impart
 "In one breath and one hand-sweep, all their art—
 "To make his graces prompt as blossoming
 "Of plentifully-watered palms in spring :
 "Since well beseems it, whoso mounts the throne,
 "For beauty, knowledge, strength, should stand alone,
 "And mortals love the letters of his name."

—Stop ! Have you turned two pages ? Still the same
 New reign, same date. The scribe goes on to say
 How that same year, on such a month and day,
 "John the Pannonian, groundedly believed
 "A blacksmith's bastard, whose hard hand reprieved
 "The Empire from its fate the year before,—
 "Came, had a mind to take the crown, and wore
 "The same for six years, (during which the Huns
 "Kept off their fingers from us) till his sons
 "Put something in his liquor"—and so forth.
 Then a new reign. Stay—"Take at its just worth"
 (Subjoins an annotator) "what I give
 "As hearsay. Some think, John let Protus live
 "And slip away. 'T is said, he reached man's age
 "At some blind northern court ; made, first a page,
 "Then tutor to the children ; last, of use
 "About the hunting-stables. I deduce
 "He wrote the little tract 'On worming dogs,'
 "Whereof the name in sundry catalogues

“ Is extant yet. A Protus of the race
“ Is rumoured to have died a monk in Thrace,—
“ And if the same, he reached senility.”

Here 's John the Smith's rough-hammered head. Great
eye,
Gross jaw and griped lips do what granite can
To give you the crown-grasper. What a man !

THE STATUE AND THE BUST.

THERE 's a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
And a statue watches it from the square,
And this story of both do our townsmen tell.

Ages ago, a lady there,
At the farthest window facing the East
Asked, “ Who rides by with the royal air ? ”

The bridesmaids' prattle around her ceased ;
She leaned forth, one on either hand ;
They saw how the blush of the bride increased—

They felt by its beats her heart expand—
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, “ The Great-Duke Ferdinand.”

That self-same instant, underneath,
The Duke rode past in his idle way,
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back—"Who is she?"
—"A bride the Riccardi brings home to-day."

Hair in heaps lay heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure—
Carved like the heart of the coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure—
And vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
Filled the fine empty sheath of a man,—
The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.

He looked at her, as a lover can ;
She looked at him, as one who awakes :
The past was a sleep, and her life began.

Now, love so ordered for both their sakes,
A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,
But the palace overshadows one,
Because of a crime which may God requite !

To Florence and God the wrong was done,
Through the first republic's murder there
By Cosimo and his cursed son.)

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square)
'Turned in the midst of his multitude
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

Face to face the lovers stood
A single minute and no more,
While the bridegroom bent as a man subdued—

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor—
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word?
If a word did pass, which I do not think,
Only one out of the thousand heard.

'That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bed-chamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalk repassed.

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain window facing the East
She could watch like a convent's chronicler.

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,
And a feast might lead to so much beside,
He, of many evils, chose the least.

“ Freely I choose too,” said the bride—
 “ Your window and its world suffice,”
 Replied the tongue, while the heart replied—

“ If I spend the night with that devil twice,
 “ May his window serve as my loop of hell
 “ Whence a damned soul looks on paradise !

“ I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
 “ Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
 “ Ere I count another ave-bell.

“ ’T is only the coat of a page to borrow,
 “ And tie my hair in a horse-boy’s trim,
 “ And I save my soul—but not to-morrow ”—

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)
 “ My father tarries to bless my state :
 “ I must keep it one day more for him.

“ Is one day more so long to wait ?
 “ Moreover the Duke rides past, I know ;
 “ We shall see each other, sure as fate.”

She turned on her side and slept. Just so !
 So we resolve on a thing and sleep .
 So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, “ Dear or cheap
 “ As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove
 “ To body or soul, I will drain it deep.”

And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove)

And smiled " 'T was a very funeral,
" Your lady will think, this feast of ours,--
" A shame to efface, whate'er befall !

" What if we break from the Arno bowers,
" And try if Petraja, cool and green,
" Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers ? "

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said, " Too much favour for me so mean !

" But, alas ! my lady leaves the South ;
" Each wind that comes from the Apennine
" Is a menace to her tender youth :

" Nor a way exists, the wise opine,
" If she quits her palace twice this year,
" To avert the flower of life's decline."

Quoth the Duke, " A sage and a kindly fear.
" Moreover Petraja is cold this spring :
" Be our feast to-night as usual here ! "

And then to himself—" Which night shall bring
" Thy bride to her lover's embraces, fool—
" Or I am the fool, and thou art the king !

‘ Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool—

“ For to-night the Envoy arrives from France

“ Whose heart I unlock with thyself, my tool.

“ I need thee still and might miss perchance.

“ To-day is not wholly lost, beside,

“ With its hope of my lady’s countenance :

“ For I ride—what should I do but ride ?

“ And passing her palace, if I list,

“ May glance at its window—well betide ! ”

So said, so done : nor the lady missed

One ray that broke from the ardent brow,

Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,

No morrow’s sun should arise and set

And leave them then as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,

With still fresh cause to wait one day more

Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love’s brief morning wore,

With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,

They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,

But not in despite of heaven and earth :

The rose would blow when the storm passed by.

Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth
By store of fruits that supplant the rose :
The world and its ways have a certain worth :

And to press a point while these oppose
Were simple policy ; better wait :
We lose no friends and we gain no foes.

Meantime, worse fates than a lover's fate,
Who daily may ride and pass and look
Where his lady watches behind the grate !

And she—she watched the square like a book
Holding one picture and only one,
Which daily to find she undertook :

When the picture was reached the book was done,
And she turned from the picture at night to scheme
Of tearing it out for herself next sun.

So weeks grew months, years ; gleam by gleam
The glory dropped from their youth and love,
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream ;

Which hovered as dreams do, still above :
But who can take a dream for a truth ?
Oh, hide our eyes from the next remove !

One day as the lady saw her youth
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked,—
And wondered who the woman was,
Hollow-eyed and haggard-cheeked,

Fronting her silent in the glass—

“ Summon here,” she suddenly said,

“ Before the rest of my old self pass,

“ Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,

“ Who fashions the clay no love will change.

“ And fixes a beauty never to fade.

“ Let Robbia’s craft so apt and strange

“ Arrest the remains of young and fair,

“ And rivet them while the seasons range.

“ Make me a face on the window there,

“ Waiting as ever, mute the while,

“ My love to pass below in the square !

“ And let me think that it may beguile

“ Dreary days which the dead must spend

“ Down in their darkness under the aisle,

“ To say, ‘ What matters it at the end ?

“ ‘ I did no more while my heart was warm

“ ‘ Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.’

“ Where is the use of the lip’s red charm,

“ The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,

“ And the blood that blues the inside arm—

“ Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,

“ The earthly gift to an end divine ?

“ A lady of clay is as good, I trow.”

But long ere Robbia's cornice, fine,

With flowers and fruits which leaves enlace,

Was set where now is the empty shrine—

(And, leaning out of a bright blue space,

As a ghost might lean from a chink of sky,

The passionate pale lady's face—

Eyeing ever, with earnest eye

And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,

Some one who ever is passing by—)

The Duke had sighed like the simplest wretch

In Florence, “ Youth—my dream escapes !

“ Will its record stay ? ” And he bade them fetch

Some subtle moulder of brazen shapes—

“ Can the soul, the will, die out of a man

“ Ere his body find the grave that gapes ?

“ John of Douay shall effect my plan,

“ Set me on horseback here aloft,

“ Alive, as the crafty sculptor can,

“ In the very square I have crossed so oft :

“ That men may admire, when future suns

“ Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

‘ While the mouth and the brow stay brave in bronze—
 “ Admire and say, ‘ When he was alive
 “ ‘ How he would take his pleasure once ! ’

“ And it shall go hard but I contrive
 “ To listen the while, and laugh in my tomb
 “ At idleness which aspires to strive.”

So ! While these wait the trump of doom,
 How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
 Nights and days in the narrow room ?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
 What a gift life was, ages ago,
 Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Only they see not God, I know,
 Nor all that chivalry of his,
 The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
 Since, the end of life being manifest,
 He had burned his way thro’ the world to this.

I hear you reproach, “ But delay was best,
 “ For their end was a crime.”—Oh, a crime will do
 As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view !

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf ?
Where a button goes, 't were an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

The true has no value beyond the sham :
As well the counter as coin, I submit,
When your table 's a hat, and your prize, a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play !—is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will !

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin :
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I saw.
You of the virtue (we issue join)
How strive you ? *De te, fabula !*

PORPHYRIA'S LOVER.

THE rain set early in to-night,
 The sullen wind was soon awake,
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
 And did its worst to vex the lake,
 I listened with heart fit to break.
 When glided in Porphyria ; straight
 She shut the cold out and the storm,
 And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
 Blaze up, and all the cottage warm ;
 Which done, she rose, and from her form
 Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
 And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
 Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
 And, last, she sat down by my side
 And called me. When no voice replied,
 She put my arm about her waist,
 And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
 And all her yellow hair displaced,
 And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
 Murmuring how she loved me—she
 Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
 To set its struggling passion free

From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain :
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud ; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me ; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good : I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she ;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids : again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck ; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss :
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still :
The smiling rosy little head,

So glad it has its utmost will,
 That all it scorned at once is fled,
 And I, its love, am gained instead !
 Porphyria's love : she guessed not how
 Her darling one wish would be heard.
 And thus we sit together now,
 And all night long we have not stirred,
 And yet God has not said a word !

“ CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME.”

(See Edgar's song in “LEAR.”)

I.

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
 That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
 Askance to watch the working of his lie
 On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
 Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
 Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

II.

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers who might find him posted there.
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

III.

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed : neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end desried,
So much as gladness that some end might be.

IV.

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,—
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

V.

As when a sick man very near to death
Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
Freelier outside, ("since all is o'er," he saith,
"And the blow fallen no grieving can amend;")

VI.

While some discuss if near the other graves
 Be room enough for this, and when a day
 Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
 With care about the banners, scarves and staves :
 And still the man hears all, and only craves
 He may not shame such tender love and stay.

VII.

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
 Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
 So many times among "The Band"—to wit,
 The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
 Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,
 And all the doubt was now—should I be fit ?

VIII.

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
 That hateful cripple, out of his highway
Into the path he pointed. All the day
 Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
 Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
 Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

IX.

For mark ! no sooner was I fairly found
 Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
 Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
 O'er the safe road, 't was gone ; grey plain all round :
 Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
 I might go on ; nought else remained to do.

X.

So, on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature ; nothing throve :
For flowers— as well expect a cedar grove !
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
You 'd think ; a burr had been a treasure trove.

XI.

No ! penury, inertness and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. " See
" Or shut your eyes," said Nature peevishly,
" It nothing skills : I cannot help my case :
" 'T is the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place,
" Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

XII.

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped ; the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
All hope of greenness ? 't is a brute must walk
Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

XIII.

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy ; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupefied, however he came there :
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud !

XIV.

Alive ? he might be dead for aught I know,
 With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,
 And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane ;
 Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe ;
 I never saw a brute I hated so ;
 He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

XV.

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
 As a man calls for wine before he fights,
 I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
 Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
 Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art :
 One taste of the old time sets all to rights.

XVI.

Not it ! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
 Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
 Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
 An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
 That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace !
 Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

XVII.

Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands
 Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
 What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.
 Good—but the scene shifts—faugh ! what hangman hands
 Pin to his breast a parchment ? His own bands
 Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst !

XVIII.

Better this present than a past like that ;
Back therefore to my darkening path again !
No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howlet or a bat ?
I asked : when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

XIX.

A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms ;
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

XX.

So petty yet so spiteful ! All along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it ;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng :
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

XXI.

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard !
—It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But, ugh ! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

XXII.

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
 Now for a better country. Vain presage !
 Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,
 Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
 Soil to a splash ? Toads in a poisoned tank,
 Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

XXIII.

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.
 What penned them there, with all the plain to choose ?
 No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
 None out of it. Mad brewage set to work
 Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
 Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

XXIV.

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there !
 What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,
 Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel
 Men's bodies out like silk ? with all the air
 Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
 Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

XXV.

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
 Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
 Desperate and done with ; (so a fool finds mirth,
 Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
 Changes and off he goes !) within a rood—
 Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

XXVI.

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
Now patches where some leanness of the soil 's
Broke into moss or substances like boils ;
Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII.

And just as far as ever from the end !
Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
To point my footstep further ! At the thought,
A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII.

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
All round to mountains—with such name to grace
Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you !
How to get from them was no clearer case.

XXIX.

Yet half I seemed to recognise some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—
In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
As, when a trap shuts—you 're inside the den !

XXX.

Burningly it came on me all at once,
 This was the place ! those two hills on the right,
 Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight ;
 While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Duncce,
 Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
 After a life spent training for the sight !

XXXI.

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself ?
 The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
 Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
 In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
 Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
 He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

XXXII.

Not see ? because of night perhaps ?—why, day
 Came back again for that ! before it left,
 The dying sunset kindled through a cleft :
 The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,
 Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
 “ Now stab and end the creature—to the heft ! ”

XXXIII.

Not hear ? when noise was everywhere ! it tolled
 Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears,
 Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—
 How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
 And such was fortunate, yet each of old
 Lost, lost ! one moment knelled the woe of years.

XXXIV.

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture ! in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*"

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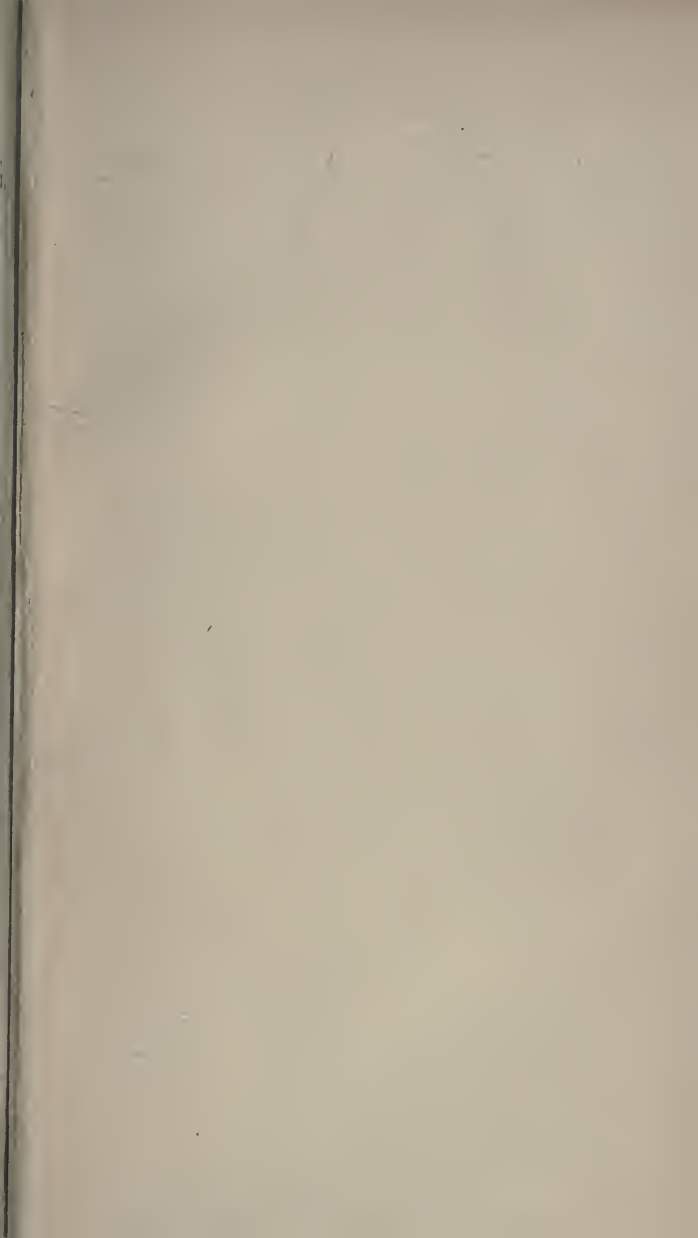
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